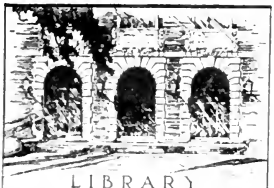

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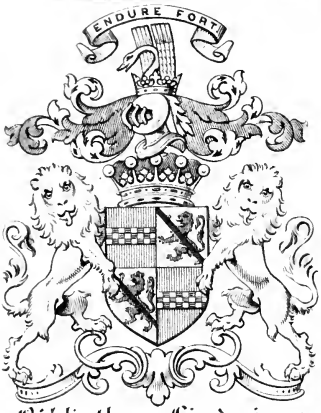

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THE

STUDENT'S WIFE.

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "MY SISTER MINNIE," "FERNLEY MANOR," "OUR GUARDIAN," "GEORGIANA HAMMOND," ETC.

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THE STUDENT'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

It was, undoubtedly, Philip Maranham, and not his ghost—as the first glance at that altered countenance might have led those who now gazed at him to imagine.

He sat where the shadows in the room were deepest; and close beside him lay stretched his faithful dogs, looking up into their master's face with a piteous and sorrowful expression, as though they really comprehended that he had some heavy grief to bear, and wished to let him know that they, at least, could feel for him.

"Philip!—my poor Philip!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrest, as he rose from his chair—not as in former times, with the wild,

affectionate impetuosity that formed so strong a feature in his character; but in a touchingly subdued and quiet manner—to receive his aunt's embrace. "Philip!—my poor Philip! How came you here at such a time?"

Without answering this inquiry he turned abruptly from the questioner, and, fixing his eyes on the bouquet that Caroline held in her hand, he said, with mournful bitterness—

"So even that was rejected! I might have guessed how it would be."

Without resenting, by word or look, his entire forgetfulness of herself, Caroline hastened to reply, soothingly—

"Indeed you are mistaken, Philip. Nobody had the slightest suspicion of whom these flowers came from—nobody had an idea that you were in the neighbourhood. Besides, Mrs. Singleton *did* carry them with her to the church."

"Mrs. Singleton! *How very kind and considerate you are,* Miss Caroline Ash-

ton," he exclaimed, with a touch of his old fierceness. "Did you think I was likely to forget that the bright angel, who is dearer to me than the light of Heaven, has been taken from me by that conceited, pragmatical hypocrite who owns the name of Singleton? Let me tell you, then, that the knowledge is burnt into my soul with the hottest firebrand that was ever kindled, and that your charitable intention of refreshing my memory on the subject was as superfluous as it was cruel. But I might have known that you would have delighted to taunt me with my misery."

"Oh! Philip," said Mrs. Forrest, in tones of tender reproach—for Caroline had left the room abruptly—"you are wrong, very wrong, to speak in this way to one whose unvarying kindness to you has been to me a source of the greatest astonishment. Be assured, my dear, dear boy, that Miss Ashton's giving Theresa, at once, her new name, was both kind and considerate, in the highest degree; for, unless your

heart and your principles are much worse than I imagine them to be, the more you are accustomed to think of her, and to hear her spoken of, as the wife of another, the sooner will you conquer the attachment which is at present a source of such bitter sorrow to you and to us all."

Philip had listened at first impatiently to his aunt's remonstrance, but by the time she had finished speaking, his better feelings had prevailed, and, grasping her hand, he replied, eagerly,—

"I know you are right, and that Carry was right, and kind, as she always is. But I am a brute, a demon, a wretch, unfit to live. I am not going to stay here to make you all miserable. In twenty-four hours I shall be far on my road to—the devil, perhaps, but certainly as far as possible from Elderton."

"I hope not, dear Philip," said his aunt mildly. "I sincerely hope and trust you intend to make this once more your home. I have few enjoyments now, and in leaving

me again you will deprive me of the greatest I can ever in this world experience."

"My dearest aunt, you do not know me, or you would not ask me to stay. I am all well enough when things go right with me; but when they don't, I give you my honour, I'm the veriest torment on the face of the earth. Besides, I cannot go on leading a life of indolence."

"What, then, do you propose to do?"

"I propose nothing. I want others to propose for me. My own mind is not capable of turning yet from the one subject that has so long engrossed it."

"And, therefore, you would clearly be unfit for any employment at present. No, my dear boy, you must remain with us for awhile, and we will all consult together by and bye, respecting your future movements."

"Aunt, I cannot stay at Elderton; but send Carry to me now. I should like to beg her pardon for my brutal ingratitude, that, at least, we may part good friends."

Mrs. Forrest, in spite of her deep love for her nephew, was too gentle and too nervous to contend long with him on any subject whatever; so she refrained from urging her wishes more decidedly, and went to ascertain whether Caroline would be induced to accede to his rather imperative demand.

Her quiet knock at Miss Ashton's door was followed by an immediate permission to enter; and, on advancing into the room, she found Caroline sitting by her little work table in an attitude of marked dejection, and bearing on her countenance the traces of tears that had been hastily wiped away.

Of course, Mrs. Forrest was not going to make any comment on this. She only said—

"My dear, Philip is anxious to see you, that he may apologize for his great rudeness to you; but, I fear, he has tired out even your patience at last. I assure you, Caroline, it grieves and distresses me be-

yond measure to see him treat you as he does. But he is very unhappy now, and declares that he shall leave us again in a few hours."

"Mrs. Forrest," said Caroline—looking up, and trying to shade her tell-tale face—"you must not think that I resent poor Philip's impatience, or that I do not pity him from my very heart; but I really could not go down to him just now. Let me remain alone till the evening—I cannot eat any dinner after our late breakfast—and then I will submit to be victimized with as good a grace as possible."

She smiled in saying the last words; but Mrs. Forrest saw that it was with an effort, and wisely left her, at once, to the solitude she coveted.

Philip was very much disappointed, and inclined to be indignant, when he heard that Caroline refused to come to him immediately: but he had many inquiries to make concerning Theresa, and, as his aunt thought fit, for this once, to indulge him,

by replying to them, he managed to get through the morning pretty well, and announced, without any further solicitations from Mrs. Forrest, his intention of deferring his departure until the following day.

Before the evening arrived there was a striking change in the weather; for the bright sun became obscured by grey, heavy-looking clouds; the soft breeze fell, and was succeeded by a close, sultry air; the flowers languished, and hung their fair heads wearily; and everything gave indications of a rapidly approaching storm.

About five o'clock Caroline entered the room where Mrs. Forrest and her nephew were sitting, and asked the latter if she should play, or sing, or read to him; or if he would like to look at some new books that she had lately received from London.

"No, no, no,—a thousand times no,"—he replied, decisively: "but if you have been angel enough to forgive my brutality of this morning, I should like you to walk with me in some of your quiet lanes or

fields, where we should be certain of not meeting a living creature."

Before Caroline could reply, Mrs. Forrest said, anxiously,—"Pray do not think of going out this evening. It will rain in torrents presently; and I should not be surprised if we have thunder and lightning as well."

"That would be glorious!" exclaimed Philip, in quite an animated manner. "I will take care of Miss Ashton, if she will trust herself to me. Do come, Carry, dear. I have so very much to talk to you about, and to-morrow, early, I'm off—perhaps for ever."

"But the poor girl is quite ill and nervous in a thunder-storm," Mrs. Forrest said again. "I am surprised that you should even ask her to expose herself to it."

The gentle widow was, doubtlessly, much more surprised when Caroline said, quietly, —"I will go, Philip,"—and immediately went out of the room to prepare herself for the expedition.

"This is absolute madness," continued Mrs. Forrest, when she was alone with her nephew. "You are really most inconsiderate, Philip; and I think Miss Ashton suffers her good nature to run away strangely with her judgment."

"Nonsense, my dear aunt. She is strong enough to bear a little wetting; and, as for anything beyond, trust to me to take care of her."

Caroline's return to the room prevented further argument; and as she appeared quite decided to have her way in the matter, poor Mrs. Forrest could only entreat of them not to wander far from home, and promised to have tea and a comfortable fire ready to welcome them when they came back.

For nearly ten minutes Philip and his companion walked on quickly, without exchanging a word; but as they entered the lane where the two girls had been so alarmed the evening before, Philip turned round suddenly, and began—

"So it seems that you are determined not to be the first to speak, Miss Ashton; and yet, I think that, after all your promises of sisterly counsel and sisterly affection, you might have had the grace to say you pitied my present sufferings. You would have done so, cold as you are, had you seen me as I followed you and—*Mrs. Singleton* (you see I have not forgotten your lesson) from the bennel last night, creeping amongst the brushwood, like some guilty thing, that I might not cast one cloud over the perfect happiness of her who had, evidently, put aside all remembrance of *my* love and my despair. I did not see her face, but I yearned to do so; and for this purpose it was that I made that rustling in the hedge-trees, that attracted your immediate attention, but which failed in procuring for me the gratification I so impatiently sought. Yet, I had not supposed the simple desire to look upon that bright, angel face a crime of such terrible blackness; but it must have been, or I should

not have been punished as I was, by hearing those accents of joy and boundless confidence, in which she said—"Yes, it is Lawrence! we are quite safe, now, Carry!" But I laughed afterwards, in spite of my unfathomable rage and agony—I laughed, when she cautioned you not to let her lover know that you had been alarmed, lest he should risk his precious life in chasing the daring offender. Oh, that was rich—it really was—although *you* appeared wholly unconscious of its sublime absurdity. Trust me, Lawrence Singleton would never glorify himself by martial deeds; he is formed of very different stuff. Not that I have forgotten the orchard scene, and the crazy ladder, and Mr. Student's abrupt and undignified descent. Oh, no, no—I remember it all; and so I did last night, as I lay looking up at the stars, in the damp church yard; for, to let you into a secret, Carry, my lodging was on the cold ground—the cold ground. You should sing that to me when we get home again."

As Philip paused here, Caroline felt that she must make some remark, although the emotion that was nearly choking her would have rendered silence far more grateful. She said—

"You surely did not remain without shelter during the whole night, Philip? Even *you*, I should suppose, incapable of such madness as that."

"But you have no right to judge of my capabilities, Miss Ashton. My worthy aunt would have supposed *you* incapable of venturing out in threatening weather like this; and yet you have done it, and are walking on as calmly as if those black clouds were not going, in a few minutes, to break in angry violence upon our devoted heads! Pshaw! what do we know of each other's hearts, or each other's capabilities?"

Caroline raised her eyes, for the first time since they had left the house, to the rapidly gathering clouds above them, and although there was no alarm or excitement in her voice, she said, immediately—

"Don't you think we had better turn now, Philip? There is no shelter in these narrow lanes; and if the storm does come on, your aunt will be in a dreadful state of terror about us."

"There will be shelter in the 'bennel,' he replied, recklessly; "and I like this better than sitting by my good aunt's fireside, and listening to the ticking of the clock, and fighting with my own rebellious thoughts. No; let us, at all risks, proceed, Carry. I will look after you."

Whether Miss Ashton shrank from the imputation of cowardice or ill-nature, or whether she really preferred accompanying Philip to returning home alone, I must leave the intelligent reader to judge: stating only, that there was not the slightest apparent reluctance in her acquiescence with the will of her companion.

By dint of rapid walking they contrived to reach the "bennel" before a drop of rain descended; but scarcely had their footsteps pressed the soft turf that carpeted

this favoured spot, when a roll of distant thunder announced the beginning of the storm, and was immediately followed by a fierce, pitiless, blinding torrent of hail, which drenched the imprudent wanderers to the skin, and obliged Caroline to cling to a neighbouring tree for support.

"Never mind," said Philip, when he could get breath to speak: "we will run, when this delicious shower has a little abated, to that high tree, under which you and your friend were resting yesterday evening. There you will feel scarcely anything of the rain, and, I am sure, we shall not have much thunder."

A tremendous peal—apparently, just above their heads—at that moment contradicted this premature assertion, and occasioned Caroline—notwithstanding her recently acquired heroism—to turn very pale, and decline standing nearer to the trees than they were at present.

"Oh, this is splendid!" continued Philip, as the blue, forked lightning began to play

along the darkening Heavens. "Look, Carry, what strange, fantastic forms that bright fluid takes as it flashes through the inky clouds! The elements are keeping this fine jubilee to do honour to Mrs. Singleton's wedding day. What could be grander music than the rolling of that majestic thunder! Ah! that *was* a clap! Caroline, you are not frightened, are you?"

"Not much, Philip: but it is an awful scene, and one in which I do not like to hear the impatient murmurings of a human being against the trials that God has appointed him."

"You think me a desperate sinner, don't you, Carry?"

"Not desperate, I hope, but a sinner, certainly—like all the rest of us."

"Not like you. Your virtues must be supernatural, or you would never be standing here, exposed to a terrible storm, by the side of one who has repaid all your constant kindness by the basest ingratitude."

"Nonsense, Philip!" replied Caroline, trying hard to speak with composure. "You know I do not heed your wilfulness in the least; and as for my kindness—as you call it—I am quite sure I have felt more pleasure in bestowing than you have in receiving it."

"Of course you have; because you laid in a stock of virtue and amiability at Fairfield House that a long life-time would scarcely exhaust. The storm is getting fiercer, Carry, although we are standing here and talking as calmly as if stone walls enclosed us. But you are beginning to shiver; and I believe, in spite of our comparative shelter in this spot, it would be desirable, for your sake, to think of returning home."

"It *is* cold," said poor Caroline, drawing her thin shawl closer round her; "and, if you can insure our escaping drowning, I am quite of opinion that we ought to go."

"But if I asked you to expose yourself to the chance of a watery grave, you would,

I know, be too amiable to say me nay. I have sometimes wondered at what point your self-sacrifice would cry, 'thus far, and no farther!' But, dear Carry, how pale you have grown! We must risk all to get home. What a selfish idiot I have been."

Caroline was indeed shivering violently from the combined effects of cold, terror, and perhaps some other emotion, to which she had yet given no definite name.

When they began to move from their resting-place she found that the exertion of walking, or rather wading, through the wet, saturated ground, was almost beyond her strength; and on Philip's throwing his arm round her waist, to support, and, in some degree, assist her progress, she did not, as in former days, indignantly repel him, but, on the contrary, expressed herself grateful for the thoughtfulness which had prompted the attention.

"What a little coward you are, after all, Carry," said Philip, as they proceeded slowly and with difficulty down the hill

leading from the bennel. "I can feel your heart beating against my arm—that calm, stoical heart, too, whose pulses are ordinarily disciplined in such an admirable and perfect manner. How wonderfully unselfish you must be to have come out with me to-night. I am half inclined to test this curious and most uncommon good nature, by demanding from you a greater boon than any you have hitherto granted. What do you say Caroline? Shall I prefer my request?"

"If you like. I feel sufficiently helpless and dependent just now to be more than usually generous. What am I to do for you next, Philip?"

"Marry me."

With a quick and energetic movement, in spite of the weakness that was fast creeping on her, Caroline disengaged herself from Philip's supporting arm, and, forgetting the storm that was still raging around them, she stood motionless in the spot where these startling words had been

uttered; and fixing her expressive eyes on the face of her companion, said, with more of sorrow than anger in her voice—

"Philip, I would do much—very much, to promote your real happiness. I would even sacrifice my personal inclinations to divert your mind from any passing sorrow; and this because I feel a deep, sincere, and affectionate interest in Mrs. Forrest's nephew; but I will not, either now or ever, be made the subject of your idle jests."

"Caroline, I was not jesting, as you ought to know," replied Philip, almost sternly; "but come on now, or I shall have your life to answer for."

Caroline silently obeyed; but not a word more was spoken by either of them till they reached a portion of the road, which it was quite impossible for the former to pass without assistance from her companion. He waited, however, to see whether she would ask for his arm again; and, finding that she showed no intention

of doing so, he said, drily—"Shall I command the fairies to emerge from the greenwood for the purpose of helping Miss Ashton over these crystal pools, or is it her pleasure to remain here till some valiant knight errant arrives to carry her across on his prancing steed?"

Caroline could not avoid feeling that there was something ridiculous in her situation; and, a smile appearing for a moment on her lips, Philip no longer hesitated, but lifted her over the watery barriers as if she had been a little child. Then, drawing her arm within his own, he hurried her quickly onwards, and seemed too much absorbed in the contemplation of the still raging storm to care for any further conversation.

Only, as they came at length in sight of the cottage, he said, abruptly, and in an earnest voice—"Caroline, I did not jest. As I hope for Heaven, I meant what I said. Do you believe me now?"

"Yes; but you are excited, Philip—you

have uttered many strange things this evening. Your judgment is weakened and distorted. Let us speak of this no more."

Mrs. Forrest was so delighted to receive back the wanderers safe and sound, that she forgot nearly all the reproaches she had been heaping up for them since the storm began. Caroline's miserable plight engrossed her whole attention; and bidding Philip look to himself immediately, she drew her imprudent guest up stairs, and, with Susan's assistance, soon disembarrassed the pale and shivering girl of her wet garments—prevailed on her to swallow a tumbler of hot negus—but was altogether unsuccessful in her endeavours to get the delinquent to bed, as Caroline declared her only chance of escaping cold was by baking herself at the parlour fire, and enjoying, in Mrs. Forrest's society, the warm tea that the latter had so thoughtfully provided.

"You are a naughty, wilful girl," said the widow, as she pinned a thick shawl

over the heaps of warm clothes she had obliged Caroline to put on. "And if anybody applies to me for your character, you may depend on it the one I shall give will be very different from that I received with you from the mistress of Fairfield House."

Miss Ashton smiled at this threat, and was then commanded to go down at once and establish herself in an easy chair on the warmest side of the fire-place.

Filling her hands with books from the well stocked shelves that hung round the room, Caroline prepared willingly to obey this order; but, what was her astonishment, on entering the sitting-room, to find Philip standing in the same spot where she had left him, his wet clothes dripping remorselessly on his aunt's pretty hearth-rug, and his eyes fixed, with a half-vacant, abstracted expression, on the streaming window panes, through which nothing but a dim, shadowy, desolate-looking landscape was discernible.

"Oh, Philip, what *can* you be thinking

of? Are you really quite mad?" were Caroline's first eager questions, as she gazed at the half-drowned figure of her recent companion, who, without moving from his place, replied, quietly—

"Why, what's the matter, Miss Ashton? What act of insanity have you to bring against me now?"

"That of remaining in those wet clothes one moment longer than was necessary. Philip, do not be childish, I implore of you. For your aunt's sake go immediately and take them off. Do, Philip—pray do!"

"And can Miss Ashton, indeed, feel sufficient interest in '*Mrs. Forrest's nephew*' as to care whether he catches his death or not?" said Philip, with provoking sarcasm. "Mrs. Forrest ought to be greatly flattered by such amiable consideration. Happy Mrs. Forrest!"

"Wretched Mrs. Forrest, rather," answered Caroline, "to have such a wayward, foolish, disagreeable, and selfish nephew.

But, once more, Philip—to please me, to oblige me infinitely—will you go?"

"I don't see why I should, since it is only a reflected interest you feel in me, because I happen to be Mrs. Forrest's nephew. However, don't look sorrowful, Carry, and I will see what I can do. What are all those books brought down to-night for?"

"To read to you, if you like—if you will be reasonable and good-natured."

"*Will* you read to me Caroline?"

"Certainly. You are very sure I will."

"And you will sit on that little Ottoman by the fire, at my aunt's feet; and I, having lodged on the cold ground last night, will stretch my weary limbs on the sofa opposite, where I can contemplate your serene and pleasant countenance, and, perchance, steal from it some few grains of peace to infuse into my own restless heart."

Everything shall be as you say, Philip, if you will but go at once and do as I ask you. Ah, there is your aunt coming. Do

not let her see how wildly imprudent you have been."

In about five minutes Philip returned completely re-equipped; and although Caroline was already seated at the tea table, he unceremoniously seized her arm and drew her out of the room to a window in the passage that looked towards the west.

"The storm is over, you perceive, Miss Ashton, or at least the worst of it," he began, when they stood still in the above mentioned spot; "and if, with those steadfast eyes of yours you will follow the direction of my finger, you will discern a faint streak of blue gleaming athwart the darkest of the clouds that yet lower in the unsettled sky. Do you see it?"

"Yes, plainly; for now the black cloud seems rapidly passing from before it."

"It is—and can you guess what I have brought you here to say?"

"No—I thought it was to look at that harbinger of returning sunshine."

"And to tell you that what that speck

of Heaven's blue is to the dark clouds around it, you might, if you chose, be to this darker heart of mine—the disperser of the gloom, the harbinger of a brighter and more peaceful day. Now do not trouble yourself to repeat again that I am excited. I know I am, and shall be, until communion with a serener soul exorcises the demons that have at present got possession of mine."

"But now, Philip, I think we had better return to the tea table."

"Carry," said Philip, bending suddenly to look into her averted face; "you overact your part. But, as you say, we had better return to the tea table."

CHAPTER II.

It was very easy for Caroline Ashton to say, the next morning when Susan came, at a late hour to call her, that she had not been able to sleep on account of the excitement of her nerves, which exposure to the storm had occasioned. How far she was justified in ascribing her wakefulness to this cause, I must leave the reader to determine; but that her own conscience reproached her, may be inferred, from the fact of Susan's expressions of commiseration being rather impatiently interrupted with an assurance, on Caroline's part, that she was now perfectly well, and should be down to breakfast in less than an hour.

"And please, Miss Ashton, I was to give missis's love," continued the girl, "and to tell you she would not be down this

morning, as she doesn't feel altogether well; and she hopes, if you are anyways tired or ill from yesterday, that you will stay and have your breakfast in bed likewise. It will be no trouble, miss, if you are inclined for it."

"Mrs. Forrest is very kind, Susan, and so are you," replied Caroline, with her pleasant smile: "but I greatly prefer getting up; and you can assure your mistress that I never felt better in my life."

A *tête à tête* breakfast with Philip!—perhaps a long morning spent with him alone! What was to be the result? Oh, that tiresome hair, that would not be brushed smooth;—those hateful strings, that would get into knots;—that azure ribbon,—which *somebody* so much admired,—that, for the first time, was nowhere to be found!

But at length the adornment of that graceful but unpretending person was complete; and its owner, half amused at the unusual pains she was conscious of having

bestowed upon it, ran lightly down stairs, and, finding the room vacant, busied herself in getting the breakfast ready, that Philip might find her occupied when he came in.

What a day it was, after the storm of the preceding night! The heavens one sheet of vivid blue; the sun brilliant as in the month of June; the flowers opening on all sides to welcome its blessed beams; the grass sparkling with glittering drops, that hung upon every graceful blade like diamonds on an emerald stem. And then, the perfumes that floated on the air; the mingling of the sweet hawthorn, and the lilacs, and the syringas, with which the little garden was filled—how delicious it all was; how grateful to the refined senses; how acceptable to the uncorrupted taste!

Caroline longed now for breakfast to be over, that she might go out amongst the flowers, inhale the pure air, and listen to those joy-inspiring melodies, whose faint echoes only reached her, at present, from the lanes and fields.

But why did that provoking Philip delay his appearance in this manner? Surely *he* was not going to be petted by Susan, and have his breakfast carried to him in bed. Surely, if he had been really ill, some information would have been given on the subject; at all events, there would have been bustle and movement, whereas everything seemed, to Caroline, strangely and unnaturally quiet.

But hark! there is at length a footstep in the passage—it approaches nearer—the door opens—and Susan looks in, and says, civilly,—

"If you please, miss, there are some beautiful new-laid eggs just come in—may I boil you one for your breakfast?"

"Thank you, Susan," replied Caroline. "I may, perhaps, trouble you to do so presently. But I am waiting for Mr. Philip—is he not very late this morning?"

"Law, bless you, miss," exclaimed Susan, looking greatly surprised; "don't you know? Why, he was off a little after

daybreak, by the Oxendean coach that starts at half-past five. I think it's this that missis is fretting about—for they sat up till near upon one o'clock, and I heard her begging him so to stay as they was wishing one another good night; but he said his mind was made up, and it was all of no use."

Caroline's cheek certainly flushed a little while Susan was entering into these details; but it was with perfect calmness that she said, when the girl had finished her story—

"And did not Mrs. Forrest see her nephew before he started this morning?"

"Oh yes, miss, surely; he was with her for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. But I am forgetting your egg all this time. I'll go and boil it at once."

"Oh," said Caroline, "never mind, Susan. I really am afraid I could not eat it if it was put before me. Let me know when Mrs. Forrest has finished her breakfast, as I should like to go and see her."

In a short space Susan returned with

the intelligence that her mistress was quite ready to receive Miss Ashton, and should be very glad of her society.

"Come in, my love," said the gentle voice of Mrs. Forrest, as Caroline, availing herself immediately of this invitation, knocked at the widow's door. "You see," she continued, as her young friend advanced noiselessly to the bedside, "what a weak, foolish, old woman I am. This double loss that I have sustained has quite upset my poor, feeble nerves. You will have to keep house and amuse yourself as you can for a few days, I fear, Caroline."

"Indeed! I hope you will be better to-morrow. You do well in remaining quiet for to-day. But what made Philip go off in such a hurry?"

Caroline said all this very fast, and with her eyes fixed steadfastly on Mrs. Forrest's hand, which she was holding in her own.

"Oh! my dear," replied the aunt, sorrowfully, "you know what a wild, whimsical, impulsive creature it is. Before you

and he went out yesterday he had agreed to stay till, at least, a reasonable hour to-day; and my firm conviction then was, that he would not go at all. After you left us last night he informed me, suddenly, that his fixed intention was to start by the earliest conveyance this morning; and all my efforts to detain him were but so many lost words. Poor, dear, sweet Tessie! she little thinks now what mischief that pretty face of hers has done!"

"And where has Philip gone?" asked Caroline, not feeling disposed at that moment to talk about Theresa's beauty.

"I don't know, nor do I believe that he had much idea himself, when he started, as to where his wanderings were to terminate. Poor boy! this attachment will cost him dear, I am afraid."

Now Miss Ashton was, as everybody must be convinced by this time, one of the calmest, least impulsive, and most self-possessed young ladies in the world; but there are occasions when even stoics are

moved to give utterance to their secret thoughts, and it was, therefore, not unnatural that Caroline should in this case so far betray her humanity, or rather "feminality," as to say, in a slightly indignant voice—

"I think he might have had the civility to wish me good bye last night, or at least to leave with you some apology for not having done so."

A shrewder person than Mrs. Forrest would probably have been struck both by the tone and words of this little sentence; but she was still, as Miss Ashton had on a former occasion said of her, as unsuspicious as one of the babes in the wood, and it was with the most amusing indifference and unconcern that, in answer to her companion's complaint of Philip, she said—

"Oh, by the bye, how forgetful I am. Here is a letter that he charged me to give you after he was gone. I thought it might be some manuscript poem that you had lent him; but since you remind me

that he omitted to wish you good bye, I should not wonder if it contains his excuses and farewells. Don't heed me, dear, if you like to read it now."

"Oh," said Caroline, blushing crimson, (let us hope at the falsehood she was going to utter,) "any time will do. I assure you I am in no hurry."

In consequence of this deceit, she was detained a good half hour longer in Mrs. Forrest's room, listening to the affectionate aunt's lamentations concerning Philip's hopeless love, mingled with sorrowful regrets that Lawrence Singleton should ever have come into the neighbourhood to steal a flower of which few believed him to be worthy.

All this was not too agreeable to Caroline; but having brought it upon herself, she had no choice but to submit patiently, and occasionally to cast a furtive glance at the temptingly thick packet she held in her hand, which was addressed simply to "Miss Ashton."

At length the welcome words, "Now my love, I think I will try to sleep a little," announced the termination of her penance; and with an alacrity, which fortunately Mrs. Forrest did not remark, Caroline hastened from the room, and taking her treasure to the garden, sat down under the shade of a silver birch and eagerly perused the following:—

"You were right, quite right, Caroline, when you ascribed my abrupt proposition of yesterday evening to excitement; but you were wrong, entirely wrong, when you joined with this excitement a 'distorted judgment.' For although it is perfectly true that I should never, in a calmer frame of mind, have ventured to offer you a heart that you knew was bleeding for another, still I repeat, it was anything but distortion of judgment that urged me to seek a blessing that may heal all my sickness of soul. It was rather the promptings of my good genius (if aught that is good does indeed belong to me) inciting me, in the midst

of my wretchedness, to grasp, if possible, the only means of redemption that fate has presented to my view.

"To you, Caroline, who have so long known every thought of my heart, I need not speak of my past love and folly. I write '*past*' advisedly; for although nothing could ever annihilate the deep interest I still feel in Lawrence Singleton's wife—although nothing, I believe, could ever make me think another woman as fair, as pure, as angel-like—still, Caroline, I feel assured the passion I once felt has been burnt out of my heart and nature. A passion such as this I could not experience again, not even if there were, as I am sure there cannot be, a second Theresa in the world. But you, Caroline Ashton, so wholly different from her I have adored, so calm and passionless, so prematurely thoughtful and sedate—you, the model of all those proprieties I have been accustomed to laugh at—you, unindebted to nature for any peculiar charms of face and

form—you, I feel, in some strange and unaccountable way, essential to my happiness, inseparably associated with my every dream of the future.

"I do not love you, Caroline,—at least not in the way that I have always understood love; but this is not so much because my heart has been occupied by another, or because you lack the power of inspiring a man's deepest feelings—as on account of that detestable coldness of *your* heart, which seems always to say 'Touch me not, come not near, I am a young lady from Fairfield House, and must be respected accordingly.' Yet I believe you like me, Caroline—that you feel less repugnance towards me than to any of the gender masculine who have hitherto crossed your path. I know, too, the womanly heroism of your character, and I am persuaded that if I could really succeed in convincing you that my salvation was in your hands, you would undertake the mission of soothing and reclaiming me without a murmur.

"I ask you, then, to do this—to take me with all my faults and weaknesses, to be to me my better self, my guardian angel, to teach me the secret of your own admirable philosophy—not as a friend, not as a sister even, but as a wife. And what have I to offer you in return? Have I wealth, have I honours, have I a position in the glittering world, have I the entire devotion of a heart that has never bowed itself at a woman's feet? Caroline, you know the answer. I have nothing of all this, and it is because I have nothing that I dare to hope you will confer on me the greatest of human gifts. Strange presumption—unexampled vanity, is it not?

"One word more, and I have done. I am entirely ignorant as to your future prospects—as to your worldly possessions. My aunt has never spoken to me on the subject, and you may be sure it is not a matter likely to have excited my curiosity. But whether you are without a penny, or the richest heiress in England, it will make

no difference to me. In the former case, I would work my fingers to the bone for you; in the latter, I should have no apprehension of my motives being suspected by any for whose esteem I care. And now, Caroline, I have told you all, except that I have thought it advisable to go away until your decision is made. For, do I not know how cautiously and deliberately my friend—whether her inclinations are for or against me—will ponder all the pros and cons of the case—will ask herself this question and that question—will reflect and re-reflect, before the final determination is taken. Forgive me, Carry. You see the 'old man' of malice and wickedness will peep out, even when I am trying to make the best of myself to you.

"Farewell, then, for a while! When we meet again, it will either be to bid each other a final adieu, or to astonish the world at large by appearing before it in the character of engaged lovers.

"Yours, as you shall decide,

"PHILIP MARANHAM."

And what do you suppose Caroline Ashton did when she had finished the perusal of this long and certainly, to her, most interesting letter? Did she faint—or burst into tears—or sit in wrapt and silent meditation—or pace the sunny garden, and hold commune with the silvery clouds above her?

No; for, anything of this sort would have been—as Philip would have said—inconsistent with the dignity of a young lady from Fairfield House.

She only tore, from a little pocket diary that she was in the habit of carrying about with her, a blank leaf, and wrote some hurried lines upon it—not poetry be it understood, but plain, substantial, energetic prose; and this she took with her to her room, enclosed it in an envelope, sealed it, and hid it away in a remote corner of her writing desk.

Mysterious conduct undoubtedly it was—but nothing else in the slightest degree mysterious ensued; for Caroline returned

immediately to her usual occupations—read, worked, attended to the garden, assisted in waiting upon Mrs. Forrest, who continued very unwell all the afternoon, and gave no outward sign of having anything more than common to engross her thoughts, or keep her in the state of perplexing indecision, which Philip had so saucily foretold.

In the evening Mrs. Darlington came over from the rectory, and there was much to be said about Theresa and about her husband, and about the poor father and mother, who were still in such wretched spirits, and could neither of them resume, at present, any of their accustomed avocations. And then Caroline was persuaded, while Mrs. Forrest slept, to walk home with Isabel and chat a little with Mrs. Berrington, who cried, of course, all the time, and felt no better, but rather the worse for Miss Ashton's earnest attempts at consolation.

After this, Caroline returned alone to

the cottage, found the invalid refreshed and strengthened, administered a composing draught, and then retired to her own room, perhaps a little more thankful than usual that the quiet night was come.

And thus passed the day on which Caroline Ashton received a proposal of marriage from Mrs. Forrest's nephew.

* * * * *

Some poet or poetess has remarked that time never flies so quickly as when he treads on flowers; but I am inclined to think that his progress appears even more rapid when it is marked by no particular event—when one day is the exact *fac-simile* of that which has gone before, and of that which shall follow.

This, at any rate, was the opinion of Mrs. Forrest and her young guest, when the end of the month of June found them going on still in their quiet, peaceful way, without having had, since the day that Philip left them, a single circumstance of any note to chronicle.

The sun rose and set, the flowers bloomed and faded. The inmates of the cottage ate and drank, and walked and went to rest again, and there was nothing more.

Except the arrival of two short letters from Theresa to her mother, which the latter sent over immediately for Mrs. Forrest and Caroline to read. The first was written from Ostend, merely announcing their safe arrival at that place, with assurances of her own perfect health, and promises of a regular correspondence when they made their first decided halt, which Theresa did not think would be until they arrived in Switzerland. The second was of some weeks later date, and contained the information that they had established themselves for a month or two at Geneva, where "her dear husband" (so wrote the young wife) found so much in the scenery to interest and delight him; that they spent nearly all their time out of doors, and this must form her excuse for not writing more or oftener. She was, of course, very, very

happy, and scarcely knew how the hours flew by, although it would be the greatest of pleasures to her to see her beloved parents, and other dear friends at Elderton, once more. Love and kisses in abundance were added for everybody, and so the letter concluded.

It was very natural that, having so little in the way of novelty to amuse and engross their minds, the amiable inmates of the cottage should sympathize, heart and soul, with Theresa's parents, in the deeply anxious interest the slightest circumstance connected with their lost darling inspired. Her letters afforded slight food for speculations concerning the reality of the happiness she assumed; nevertheless, speculations of every sort and kind were hazarded constantly by each member of the *female* circle, at least, on this most important point, and not a day passed without one or other of them saying repeatedly—

"What would I give to have the power of looking in upon Mr. and Mrs. Singleton, just now?"

But, although they were, one and all, obliged to endure the torments of ignorance and suspense on the subject of Theresa's wedded happiness, I do not see why the reader should be similarly tantalized; therefore, in the following chapter, we will take a journey to Switzerland, and, peeping in upon the young couple when they least expect it, discover all we can.

CHAPTER III.

At the time of which I am writing, the continental towns and hotels were not infested by English travellers as they are at present. Young men, chiefly sons of noblemen, making, with their tutors, the grand tour, were even then common enough; but brides and bridegrooms were decided rarities—and when they happened to be as fair as Theresa, and as reckless of expenditure as Lawrence, it may be supposed that they created no slight sensation and interest amongst the natives.

It is no exaggeration to say that nearly half the town of Geneva were stationed every morning at their doors and windows to see Mr. and Mrs. Singleton go by on their road to those exquisite but fatiguing walks with which the neighbourhood

abounded. The women all wondered how such a beautiful girl as Theresa could have married such an ugly, grave looking man as Lawrence. The men declared it was a cruel thing to make those pretty little feet climb the rough mountains, and set down the husband, in spite of his lavish generosity, for an English brute.

But there were a few of the townsfolk who had occasionally met the married lovers in their ramblings over these same rough mountains, and they had a different tale to tell. For they had seen the quiet, patient energy with which the little feet surmounted all the difficulties of the road; they had observed, too, the look of grateful, boundless love with which the fair young wife repaid any occasional assistance that the dreamy husband chanced to offer her, when the path grew more than usually rugged; and one demure young peasant girl, at whom Lawrence had glanced admiringly as she passed, declared that she had once seen him bend down to kiss the

pale cheek of his weary companion, and heard him whisper a few words that she was quite sure were intended to express all sorts of love and tenderness.

In the meanwhile the unconscious objects of so much interest pursued their quiet way, caring nothing for what was said or thought about them—wholly engrossed in their mutual feelings, and their respective hopes and wishes for the time to come.

Let us look in upon them after one of those fatiguing days spent in wandering over the hot mountains.

It was about half an hour before sunset, and Mr. and Mrs. Singleton had just sent away the tea equipage, and were going to enjoy a few hours of that delicious, quiet indolence which their exertions, during the whole morning, rendered as necessary as it was delightful to them.

Indolence of body *only*, be it understood, for the minds of both these young people had seldom been more active than they were at present.

It was a pretty enough sight to look at them—Theresa, in her white dress, standing by the window of their curiously, but not inelegantly, furnished drawing-room, that she might catch the first gleams of the sinking sun on the sparkling lake below; and Lawrence, sitting still by the table, where they had been having tea, his head resting, as usual, on his hand, his eyes fixed musingly and half-sorrowfully—it might have been fancied—on the sweet, youthful figure of his beautiful companion.

This was pretty; but it was far, far prettier when Lawrence, suddenly leaning back in his chair, said, in a voice of tender softness—

"Come to me, little wife;" and Theresa, with one joyous bound, obeyed the welcome summons, and had her arms wound tightly round her husband's neck.

You should have seen that—all who imagine that matrimony must necessarily destroy the romance of love, should have seen that—should have seen Theresa's up-

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turned glance of boundless, fathomless devotion, as, nestling her fair head in Lawrence's bosom, she whispered some of those sweetly foolish words which become wisdom in the hearts they are intended to bless.

And who could, for one moment, doubt that Lawrence Singleton loved intensely the gentle, clinging, trusting creature he had voluntarily made his own? Who would mistake the expression of those earnest, thoughtful eyes, the tones of that eloquent and persuasive voice, as, pressing Theresa warmly to his heart, and kissing again and again the glowing cheek that rested so contentedly on his shoulder, he said, in answer to her whispered words—

"My darling little wife must be very serious and attentive for half an hour. I am going to talk to her."

"Dear, dear Lawrence, I will not even breathe for a whole hour—two, three whole hours, if you like. Stay—let me get the footstool and sit at your feet, and have

your hand in mine while you are speaking. There, that is nice and pleasant. And now I am quite ready to listen—*dear* Lawrence!"

"And dear, dearest Tessie! But we must really be grave and reasonable for a short time. Two long months we have done nothing but make love and talk nonsense to each other."

"Oh, Lawrence!" exclaimed the little wife, in such a mournfully, reproachful tone—"how can you call them *long* months? To me they have been shorter than any I have ever passed."

"I beg your pardon, Tessie; but I did not mean in that way. You know well, little Syren, that I have been as happy as yourself during the time we have spent together. And I know well that, for many, many months, your bright eyes have lured me into forgetfulness of all those objects to which I had vowed myself before. But pleasant as this element of passion and tenderness has been to me,

Theresa, it is not my natural or legitimate one. Do not look so frightened, little wife: you cannot suppose that, once having tasted the pure joy of loving and being loved, I would, even if I could, forego it. No, no; my pretty Tessie must henceforth be my first object, my first care, my chief delight; but I ought not, even for her, to neglect entirely those pursuits which have hitherto formed the sole pleasure of my existence, and which I feel there is a moral necessity in my nature for continuing. I often think, Theresa—I was thinking just before I called you from the window now—that, in spite of the sincere affection that unites us, we are, in many respects, an ill-matched pair."

"Lawrence, how cruel you are to-night. What have I done to make you talk so strangely?"

"You have done nothing, dearest; nor would you call me cruel did you rightly understand my meaning. I have no fears for myself—no apprehension that you will

ever be less dear and precious to me than you are at this moment; but sometimes in my visions of the future, I see my dear little Tessie growing pale and sad, and weary—weary of a husband, who is by nature and habit unfitted for the enjoyments of social or domestic life—who is fitted only for a solitary cave in one of these wild mountains—and pale and sad because this unworthy idol of her pure affections disappoints her fond anticipations concerning him. My sweet wife, I cannot but feel that I have been selfish in taking you from your happy home. I cannot but wish that, for your sake—*only* yours, my Tessie—we two had never met."

"Lawrence—my own Lawrence! you will break my heart, if you talk in this way," said Theresa, with tears that had long been gathering, pouring down her cheeks. "How little can you know of my love, if you doubt that simply to be near you—to be assured that you are well—to see you daily—to contribute, in ever so

slight a degree, to your happiness, is joy enough for me. I am conscious—painfully conscious, of my own vast inferiority to you; but do not let this interfere with our comfort, or our affection. I will never ask one moment more of your society than you feel justified in giving; I will never intrude upon your solitude; you shall not find me an exacting wife. In all, and everything, dearest Lawrence, your will shall be mine; only love me always, and never—no never say again that for anybody's sake you wish we had not met!"

"My darling wife," replied the young husband, as he kissed away every lingering tear, "I promise you that I never will. You are not inferior to me, Theresa; but your mind is cast in a softer, gentler mould. No matter; for I can associate you, in some degree, in my pursuits. I could scarcely, indeed, avoid doing so. You shall be my secretary — my amanuensis, Tessie. In this way we shall rarely need to be separated. Do you remember my

once asking you if those little fingers could write uncomplainingly all the long day, and your saying there was nothing you could not do for any one you dearly loved."

"Yes, yes, I remember it well, Lawrence. And shall I really sit with you, and write your letters, and keep your papers in order, and sometimes hear you say, 'That's a good Tessie,' or 'You 're a useful little wife.' Oh, this will be delightful! How could I ever weary of this?"

Lawrence smiled rather sadly, as he replied—"It is not letters you will have to copy, Tessie. I am going to write books."

Oh, how the blue eyes opened and sparkled; and, with what amusing animation Theresa exclaimed—

"Books, Lawrence? What, novels and romances—such as I used to get when I was at school—all about knights and princesses, and tournaments and enchanted castles. Oh, but that will be delicious!—When shall we begin?"

Again the sober Lawrence smiled; but

this time there was a dash of involuntary contempt mingling with the mirth his wife's foolish prattling excited.

"We shall never begin anything of this sublime nature, Theresa," he said, quietly. "My books will treat more of reason than of sentiment—more of dry, philosophical argument than of tournaments or enchanted castles. The one I propose taking in hand first will be a series of observations on the writings of various authors, from some of whom I presume to differ. But for this my notes are nearly all prepared, and I shall be able to manage without your assistance, Tessie."

"And when is *this* to be begun, dear Lawrence?" asked Theresa, in a far less animated voice than before.

But Lawrence did not appear to hear the question; for, forgetting, apparently, who was his auditor—seeming, indeed, to be rather uttering his own thoughts aloud than addressing his wife, he launched out into an eager disquisition on the subject of

his proposed labours, and continued, eloquently enough certainly, but wearily for poor Theresa—to whom it was all Greek and Hebrew—until the little head sank upon the husband's knee, and the thoughts, in spite of every effort to detain them, strayed hither and thither, though returning ever to their eternal centre, as the dove, after its wanderings over the waste of waters, flew back with eager gladness to the sheltering ark.

All at once Lawrence paused, and appeared conscious that he was not very amusing to his companion; for, bending to look into her pensive face, he said, kindly and affectionately—

"Now, go to bed, little wife; you are tired and sleepy. I must sit up a few hours longer, just to get my scattered papers into some sort of order."

The little wife obeyed—not willingly, but because she had resolved to yield in small matters as well as great to the wishes of a husband she idolized; and because,

too, there was this night, for the first time since her marriage, a feeling of sadness in her heart that she would not for worlds have had Lawrence discover. Whence this unwelcome shadow arose, she had some difficulty in determining. It seemed too ridiculous to be unhappy because her husband was going to be an author. Why should she wish him to hide those glorious talents, which had gone far towards winning her own girlish heart, in the privacy of a domestic circle? Ought she not rather to be proud and glad that the whole world would now have an opportunity of appreciating him whom she so fully appreciated—that the whole world might now unite in crowning with the laurel wreath the brow her loving hands had so often in fancy crowned? Yes, yes—Theresa knew she had no excuse for not rejoicing at what she had this night heard—that she was weak and childish to lie awake and think of the past few months as of a happy time that would return no more.

And yet, when many hours after, Lawrence, weary and exhausted himself, came into the room, he found the blue eyes closed indeed in sleep, but the pillow wet with his young wife's tears.

CHAPTER IV.

Philip Maranham had been gone nearly two months, and no intelligence of him had during this time arrived at Elderton. Mrs. Forrest was anxious and desponding concerning this beloved but wilful nephew, whom she pictured continually as nursing, in some lonely place, his unavailing regrets, and consuming health and strength in the indulgence of a wild and hopeless sorrow.

Perhaps it may be thought that Caroline should have relieved her fears by communicating the contents of Philip's letter to herself; but Miss Ashton generally managed matters with her own conscience pretty well, and in this case it certainly did not trouble her with reproaches concerning the reserve she practised.

Nevertheless, it was not always parti-

cularly amusing or edifying to her to listen to Mrs. Forrest's observations regarding the probability of Philip's passion for Theresa continuing to shadow all his future life; and, one day, to escape a conversation of this nature, Caroline put on her bonnet, and said she would go and see Mrs. Berrington.

Having paid the visit, walked round the rectory garden, and, taking a peep at Theresa's beautiful pony—which was to be sent to Burnham Park as soon as the bride and bridegroom returned from their foreign trip—Caroline began to retrace her steps; but, feeling more in a meditative than a talking mood, she turned aside towards the end of the green lane, and, entering a quiet field, sat down on a sloping bank, under the shade of a long row of venerable elm trees.

It was a hot, sunny, July day; but Caroline liked warmth and sunshine. She liked, too, to see the sky all blue and cloudless—a pure, bright, spotless canopy,

suggestive of eternal peace and repose, overshadowing a world full of trouble and unrest.

This young girl, who was accustomed to hold such close commune with her own heart, and to communicate so few of her ideas to those around her, had, indeed, as Theresa had half-jestingly said, grown very serious of late—not strictly religious—for the world, with its beguiling hopes and passions, still held her in its toils, but sensible, to a certain extent, of the vanity of the things to which she clung, and desirous of learning that true wisdom for which she had yet found no earthly teacher.

To-day her thoughts were even more than usually sombre; and, enjoying the atmosphere of the place she had chosen, becoming lulled by the summer music that floated in the still air around, the time went by unheeded, and it was only by the deepening shadows of the trees under which she sat, that Caroline was at last reminded

how long she had been dreaming, and forgetting that idleness was a poison she had resolutely abjured.

It was not more than half-past two when she left the cottage—for their early dinner had only just been removed; and now the truant heard the village bells announcing, with their merry chiming, that five o'clock was past. Her conscience instantly reproached her for condemning poor Mrs. Forrest, during the whole afternoon, to the companionship of her gloomy thoughts; and she was on the point of starting up to return home when a loud, familiar barking arrested her movements, and the next moment she was more effectually chained to the spot by the sudden arrival of two large, friendly paws on either shoulder.

Tantalus and Charon, of course—nobody could mistake them: but why were they here alone?—where was their long absent master? Caroline thought if he had been at the cottage he might have taken the trouble to accompany his dogs in search of

her; but this did not prevent her returning the affectionate welcomes and caresses of his rough favourites; and having spoken kindly to them both, and stroked their sleek, glossy coats, she was gently removing their paws from her shoulders, when the boughs of the thick hedge behind were violently parted asunder, and Philip himself, considerably torn and scratched, stood an interested spectator of the scene.

Before Miss Ashton could either move or speak, he had pushed aside the dogs and was kneeling on the turf at her right hand, looking earnestly, searchingly, and almost pleadingly, it seemed, into her agitated face.

"Well, Carry, yes or no? Let me hear my fate at once. I think I have given you time enough for reflection."

Caroline stretched out her hand immediately, and replied, calmly enough, though she could not control the rapidly changing colours of her cheek, nor the tremulous motions of her lip—

"*Yes*, Philip, if you still wish it so."

"You will really be my wife? Say, upon your honour, you are serious."

"Upon my honour, I am serious, Philip, very serious. Why should you doubt it?"

"That's a good girl, then—a dear girl. You will let me kiss you now, Carry? You must, indeed, for you are mine—and people may do what they like with their own."

"And, by the same rule, as you are mine, I may do what I like with you; therefore, I desire you to sit here beside me and talk rationally for a few minutes."

"Not a bit warmed I see, even by this fierce July sun; but let me, at least, have your hand to hold. I always admired your hand, Carry. Thank you—you give it cordially. I like that placid, contented smile upon your face; it seems to assure me that, however long you may have taken to decide as to the 'to be, or not to be,' of my question, your final resolution has been adopted with a good heart. I suppose it

would be scarcely fair to ask you the exact time you employed in deliberating?"

There was something that Philip did not quite understand in the tone of Caroline's voice, as she answered, gravely—

"It would not be fair, indeed, Philip. This is a secret I mean to keep religiously." Then, smiling a little, she added—"As your penetration is seldom at fault, why not conclude that the time you allowed me was exactly the amount required for the purpose!"

"Not very flattering, however, I must confess."

"Yet you must have been lavishing such flattery upon yourself constantly during the last two months. Where have you been, Philip?"

"Oh, how admirably you young ladies can, in a moment, adapt your tones and manner to any change of circumstances! That 'where have you been, Philip?' implies a whole volume of suddenly acquired authority to demand an account of all my

movements. Nay, Carry," he continued, in a more earnest voice, and pressing tighter the hand he held, "do not apologise, or seek to unsay your words. If you only knew how sweet it is to me to feel that there is some one to take an interest in my actions—some one to whom my coming and going will bring a smile or a tear—you would not regret having spoken as you did. Dear, dear Carry, only be affectionate to me, and I shall love you with my whole heart and soul."

Caroline had tears in her eyes; but she sought to hide them, and repeated, with assumed gaiety—

"But you are not going to evade answering my question in this manner. Once more, Mr. Philip Maranham, where have you been?"

"I will tell you, Carry," he replied, cheerfully. "I have been looking after some employment in London; for I knew you would not like an idle husband; and I believe I am nearly sure—through the

interest of one of my Irish friends—of a government appointment, which, though nothing to boast of, will, at any rate, keep me out of mischief, and prove a trifling addition to my magnificent income. You don't despise my poverty, do you Carry?"

"No, Philip; and I am glad that you have a prospect of some present occupation, because I am quite sure you will be the happier for it: but I have every reason to believe that I shall have enough money for both of us by and bye. My father was a rich man when I left India, and I am the only child."

"But in this case," said Philip, as if the idea had only just occurred to him, "would not your parents object to your marrying an obscure, almost penniless individual like myself? Of course they will. What a fool I have been. But upon my word I never gave a thought to your father or mother"

"I do not think we have much to fear from either of them," replied Caroline; "for

as far as I can remember, my father was always most kind and indulgent to me; and I believe mamma will be too incensed at my neglecting to captivate Lawrence Singleton, to care whom I marry."

"Then you won't consider it necessary to wait for their formal consent. We can be married at once, can't we, Carry?"

"Not exactly, Philip. I must certainly write to India, and get an answer from thence, before I can take so grave and important a step as that of changing my name. Besides, for many other reasons, I should not choose to marry you immediately. I cannot forget how recently your whole heart was occupied by another."

A shade, sudden but deep, passed over Philip's countenance, and he did not utter a word for several minutes. But as Caroline made a movement, as if to rise, and attempted, at the same time, to withdraw her hand, he pulled her forcibly back, and said, passionately,—

"You have no right and no need to be

cautious on that account, Caroline. I told you the exact truth in my letter; and what was the truth then is the truth now, and will be the truth for ever. My love for Theresa was as much crushed from the moment she became Mrs. Singleton as it will be when you become Mrs Maranham, though that event were delayed for twenty years. If you take me at all, you shall do it with your eyes wide open. You shall know all my faults and weaknesses. I don't even promise to be a good husband to you. I am very sure I shall be often gloomy—often capricious—sometimes even tyrannical. I shall try your patience sorely, Caroline, and you will not have the consolation of feeling that you are dearer to me than another has ever been. You will be aware, on the contrary, that one I have loved better—more passionately—than I can ever love you, still exists, and may, any day, cross my path again. Now, what say you, Miss Ashton?—will you not recall your consent to be mine? There, I

give you back your hand; you are at perfect liberty to dispose of it as you please."

"Thank you, Philip," said Caroline, with a smile of calm decision. "Then here I yield it to you once more, beseeching you to raise me to my feet, that we may return to our worthy aunt, and tell her the nonsense we have both been talking."

Philip scarcely waited for the conclusion of his companion's speech ere he seized both her hands, kissed them with ardent gratitude, and then, having lifted her from the bank, drew her arm tenderly within his own, and saying, "Now you are indeed mine," walked contentedly towards the cottage, followed closely by Tantalus and Charon.

CHAPTER V.

There was a period in Mrs. Forrest's life when the most startling event in the world would scarcely have occasioned her a moment's surprise, when startling and terrifying events were of nearly daily occurrence. But this period had, happily, long been past; and, in the monotonous calm that succeeded, the quiet, peace-loving widow had resumed her original habit of being astonished at anything in the slightest degree without the pale of her ordinary experience, or that was not comprehended in her natural expectations.

When, therefore, Philip, with a composed and serious air, led up Miss Ashton to his aunt, and said,—

"Behold your future niece," it was no wonder that the startled listener should

drop the book she held in her hand, and gaze on both the young people as if she deemed them a pair of lunatics.

There was such an expression of utter, obstinate incredulity in her face, that Philip saw at once no common reasoning or explanations would convince her that they were in earnest. So, without another word, he turned suddenly to Caroline, and, putting one arm round her waist, pressed his lips confidently on her glowing forehead; and then, placing her hand in that of his half-frightened-looking aunt, exclaimed triumphantly,—

"Now, then, are you satisfied, or do you still believe that this modest young person allows me to embrace her for a joke?"

"My dear Caroline, I beg of you to tell me what it all means," Mrs. Forrest said, at last. "I am sure you will not mislead me."

"Not for the world, my best and kindest friend," replied Caroline, eagerly. "Philip has only told you the truth. We intend,

with the approbation of those interested in us, to exchange the titles of brother and sister for those of husband and wife. You, dearest Mrs. Forrest, must be the first to congratulate and wish us joy."

It was quite evident that, although a belief in the reality of what she saw and heard was rapidly fastening itself on Mrs Forrest's mind, her surprise was in no degree diminishing, and that she was still in doubt as to which of the two had most completely upset all her ideas and expectations concerning them. A few minutes ago she had imagined Philip the victim of a hopeless passion for Lawrence Singleton's wife: a few minutes ago she had imagined Caroline as free from any attachment of a sentimental nature as she was herself—as unlikely to fall in love with Philip, that wild, harum-scarum Philip—as she was to become a ballet-dancer or a singer in the streets

And now—what an unheard of revolution of all her preconceived ideas!—here

they both stood, declaring themselves attached to each other, asking her sanction to becoming one for life!

"Well," said Philip, at length, seeing that his aunt was literally unable to express her feelings—"suppose we ring for tea now; and, perhaps, under the influence of that exhilarating beverage we may all get more accustomed to our novel position. Carry, love, you shall preside, and my aunt will thus have an opportunity of judging what sort of a little matron you will be likely to turn out."

"My dear children," cried Mrs. Forrest, preventing her nephew from ringing the bell, "astonished and mystified as I am at your most unexpected disclosures, I should still have sufficient sense remaining to rejoice unfeignedly at this attachment, did I not foresee that it will encounter almost as formidable obstacles as that former one, on Philip's part, which I am so deeply thankful to be enabled to number among the things of the past. However, there

can be no doubt that a sincere mutual affection will often prove victorious over its most obstinate opponents; and, if it would be for your ultimate good and happiness, Heaven grant that such may be experienced in the present case. We will discuss the matter more fully by and bye. Now, kiss me, both of you, wonderful beings! and then we will have some tea."

In the course of the evening Caroline repeated to Mrs. Forrest what she had before told Philip concerning her reasons for not expecting much opposition on the part of her parents to the contemplated marriage. But Mrs. Forrest was very hard to be convinced that the proud Lilla Ashton would, under any circumstances, welcome a son-in-law so poor as Philip, and she implored both her nephew and Caroline not to be too sanguine about the matter.

Philip, however, was in the highest spirits, and laughed at all her warnings. He made Caroline sing to him; declared her voice was sweeter than ever; then

brought down a heap of books for her to read aloud, and, finally, growing tired of that, awoke Tantalus and Charon, and went out to have a romp with them on the lawn.

Mrs. Forrest watched him for a few minutes from the window, and then turned to Caroline—who was sitting near her—and said, with a half compassionate, half tender smile—

"Ah, my love, I fear you have undertaken a task of whose difficulties you have little conception. I shall tremble for you, Caroline, if you become that mad boy's wife."

"You will have no need to do so, dear Mrs. Forrest. I understand Philip thoroughly, and I have a lion's heart."

"Perhaps so; but you will require a dove's heart as well. Strong affection, gentleness, patience, forbearance — have you thought of all this, Caroline?"

"I believe I have. I hope sincerely I have not over-estimated my own powers."

"Philip is all brightness and amiability to-night; he is like a child who has obtained a new toy, but you must remember there is a reverse to this picture."

"I do remember it, otherwise I should never have consented to become his wife."

"Neither, dear Caroline, must you forget that he has had a prior attachment of a very serious kind. I have not, of course, the shadow of a doubt that you are everything to him now, but a man who has once loved as Philip loved Theresa will never lose a certain degree of interest in the object of such an affection. Should you, do you think, be prepared to witness calmly any excitement or agitation which a sudden meeting with Mrs. Singleton might produce?"

Caroline's colour was slightly heightened at this question, but she replied in a decided voice—"I have, and shall always have, unbounded confidence in Philip. I am quite sure he would tell me every feeling as it arose, and when there is perfect

openness there can never be very much danger."

"Well, my dear, I can only say that I admire your courage, and hope from my heart that all will turn out as you anticipate. I am still too completely bewildered to be able to think steadily about this engagement myself. When do you think of writing to your mother?"

"I shall await the arrival of the next Indian mail, as that will probably bring me letters from home. I scarcely know where to address to mamma till I hear from her again. She is never stationary very long."

"I fear Philip will be terribly impatient before you can have an answer. He will tease you to death not to wait for it; but in this, Caroline, you must promise me to be firm, for my sake as well as for your own."

"I do promise you, Mrs. Forrest—and now here he comes again. Let us talk of something else."

* * * * *

At Philip's particular request Caroline wrote to Theresa, and mentioned the engagement into which she had entered, adding that it was likely to be rather a long one, owing to the delay that must take place between writing to India and receiving an answer from thence. In a few days Theresa replied to this communication; and, as her letter contained more intelligence concerning herself and Lawrence than any that had yet been received at Elderton, I shall place it without any curtailment before the reader.

"My dearest Caroline,—

"How delighted I was to hear from you, and how more than delighted at the news your letter conveyed. So, Miss Carry, your man in the moon turns out, after all, to be Mr. Philip Maranham! And, you thought I should be surprised, did you? Learn, then, that I, long ago, suspected who it was that had won your carefully-guarded heart; and often, and often have

I puzzled my stupid brain in trying to make out how it happened that he discovered the entrance to it. I do so hope that you will be happy—that you will find Philip as agreeable after marriage as you have found him before. I am glad you will have plenty of time to study his character, though to you, and to him especially, I dare say the delay seems dreadful. What should you do if your mamma and papa refused their consent? But they could never be so cruel, I should think. How kind and good mine were to me, all throughout my engagement. Oh, Caroline! I shall never, never forget that delicious three months that I spent with you and my darling Mrs. Forrest at the cottage—the dear old cottage. You do not tell me how it is looking, or how my flowers are getting on—but what a goose I am—of course you are always looking up at the moon now, and cannot be expected to see anything or anybody upon the dull earth.

"Try and guess who popped in upon Lawrence and me the other day. We had just finished dinner, and I was playing with a little dog my husband has bought me—such a pet it is! all red and white, and curly hair—and Lawrence was looking over something he had been writing in the morning, when, suddenly, the waiter threw open our dining-room door, and announced —the honourable Arthur Cressingham!

"You will easily imagine that, remembering how he used to torment me, I was not best pleased at this apparition; but, of course, I was obliged to be civil; and Lawrence asked him to spend the evening with us. Since then Mr. Arthur has been here nearly every day; but, as he is greatly improved, and seems to recollect that I am a married woman, and not to be offended with impunity, I do not much mind his coming: besides, he brings me English books, and sweatmeats for my darling Fannan, which foolish things Lawrence is too busy with his writing to think about.

"We still take huge walks nearly every day; but I don't think Lawrence enjoys them so much as he did at first; because, sometimes when we meet Arthur Cressingham, he leaves me with him, and returns home alone to that everlasting scribbling. I don't like this at all; and should much prefer sitting for hours and hours by my husband's side, though without speaking a word, to rambling amongst the most beautiful scenes in the world with anybody else. But I wish to please Lawrence—to sacrifice my own tastes and inclinations whenever these are contrary to my husband's. You cannot imagine how I love him, Caroline—how entirely he possesses my whole heart and soul. Dear, dear Lawrence, I could die for him!

"But how I must have tired out your patience with this long, gossipping letter, and every instant of your time belonging to some one else too. Forgive me, dearest Caroline, and ask your man in the moon to forgive me also. Say all sorts of loving

things for me to my own dearest father and mother, and to Mrs. Forrest, and to your best of selves. Lawrence, I know, would send his love to everybody, if I told him I was writing; but I dare not disturb him just now, as he is literally immersed in books, papers, old manuscripts, and all kinds of dingy-looking articles. Let me hear very soon from some of you—and

"Believe me, my ever dearest Caroline,

"Your attached and affectionate

"THERESA SINGLETON."

Philip was very anxious to be allowed to see the whole of this letter, but Caroline obstinately refused to show it him. She read aloud every word that concerned Theresa, both to him and to Mrs. Forrest; and much interest was excited, and many observations made, on the artless manner in which Theresa revealed every feeling of her innocent heart.

"I knew that man was unworthy of her," exclaimed Philip, passionately, when

his aunt's silence allowed him an opportunity of putting in a word. "Hang me, if he doesn't deserve that she should fall in love with Cressingham."

Mrs. Forrest looked anxiously at Caroline, to see how she would take this outburst of feeling concerning the object of such a recent affection; but if she had any doubts of Miss Ashton's good sense they were entirely dissipated, when Caroline, approaching Philip, and laying her hand almost solemnly on his shoulder, said, earnestly,—

"Dear Philip, never, either in thoughtlessness, or in joke, or even in reprobation of her husband, associate Theresa with one idea of impurity. If ever woman was created with a heart incapable of harbouring an evil thought, that woman is Lawrence Singleton's wife."

"And if ever woman was created with a mind incapable of cherishing one ungenerous suspicion, that woman is Caroline Ashton, and shall be Philip Maranham's

wife." And as Philip spoke he threw his arms round the surprised and blushing girl, and appealed to his aunt whether he could help loving her for such a speech.

Mrs. Forrest turned away with a tear of pleasure in her eye, and began to think that these two might manage to get on together, without fighting, after all.

CHAPTER VI.

The Indian mail arrived, and brought to Caroline Ashton not only the expected letters, but news for which she was in no degree prepared.

Her father was dead.

Mrs. Ashton, after a few preliminary remarks concerning the melancholy and sudden event, wrote thus:—

"Almost as soon as you receive this letter you may expect to hear of my arrival in England, as, of course, I have nothing now to detain me here, and the very sight of the house in which your beloved father breathed his last is hateful beyond measure to me. But although I hope in so short a time to see you, I think it advisable to let you know, at once, my dear Caroline, that your poor father, instead of leaving a handsome

fortune, as everybody anticipated he would do, has left literally nothing but a little plate and furniture, which will barely cover our running debts, and the expenses of his funeral.

"You will understand that this is not a time to speak in condemnation of any one; still, I must observe, that it is a hard thing upon me, who have been accustomed to every luxury, to find myself suddenly reduced to the nominal income allotted to a colonel's widow. And how I shall contrive to live upon it I am as ignorant as a babe unborn. My only hope is that you and Lawrence Singleton have managed to fall in love with each other; and I must add, that if you have failed to secure such an excellent match, after the splendid opportunity I afforded you, I shall be very seriously chagrined, and consider the large sums spent upon your education as money entirely thrown away. Remember that you have nothing but the three thousand pounds your godmother left you, and

that this will barely pay for your bread and cheese if you reside with me. I am in too severe affliction to write more at present. You had better get your mourning immediately, as I shall, of course, send for you the moment I arrive in London.

"Ever, my dear Caroline,

"Your affectionate mother,

"LILLA ASHTON."

Caroline had left her father at too early an age to retain for him that active affection which would have excited violent and passionate grief at his loss; but as all her recollections of him were pleasing ones—and she had ever dwelt with sincere delight on the prospect of his return to England—there was a quiet depth in the sorrow she experienced, at the contents of her mother's letter, that somewhat astonished those who still imagined she possessed more goodness of heart than warmth of feeling.

For a few days she begged to be quite alone—even Philip could be no comfort to

her in the first moments of sadness and regret; but there was very little selfishness in Caroline's nature; and knowing that her friends were anxious to sympathize and to condole with her, she joined them again at the end of this period, and astonished Philip by the declaration that he was now free from his engagement.

Both aunt and nephew gazed at her with mutely enquiring looks, and then Caroline said firmly—

"I believed, when I consented to marry Philip, that I should one day have a fortune to bestow upon him. It would have been my delight to have done so. This idea has proved erroneous; and though I know he cares nothing for money, I repeat again, he is free. *I* care for it, for his sake at least. He must not, so young as he is, slave himself to death for a wife—at any rate, he shall not do it for me."

"And who shall hinder me?" exclaimed Philip brusquely, giving the table a blow that made it ring again. "I tell you

what, Carry, if ever you say one word more about not having me, I swear I'll run away with you, though all the Mrs. Ashtons in the world should try to prevent it, or have me hanged when it was done. Now we understand one another thoroughly, don't we, and you shall take a turn with me in the garden to see if the air won't brighten up that white face of yours a bit. Come, we have many things to talk about, and I have all sorts of plans to propose."

Notwithstanding Philip's very powerful and original argument, it is probable that Caroline would have had firmness to persist in dissolving the engagement, had not Mrs. Forrest laboured unceasingly in persuading her that a ready-made fortune was the last thing to be desired for her nephew —that a real necessity for exertion would conduce infinitely more both to his happiness and respectability.

"If you had absolutely nothing but what he might earn, or if you, Caroline,

had many expensive tastes or habits, I should advise very differently," said Mrs. Forrest in conclusion; "but you have, between you, enough to keep want away, and if Philip gets the situation he is expecting, I do not see why—as far as money is concerned—you should hesitate to marry. Only remember one thing—that mutual affection, strong mutual affection, is far more indispensable to poor people, than it is to rich."

In less than a fortnight, Caroline received a brief summons from her mother to join her in London, which was accompanied by a polite note to Mrs. Forrest, conveying the writer's thanks for the care she had bestowed upon Miss Ashton, and the expression of a hope that she had not found the charge a very troublesome or annoying one.

From the whole wording of this letter, it appeared evident that Mrs. Ashton intended to intimate that her daughter was to bid a final adieu to Elderton, and al-

though Caroline assured Mrs. Forrest that no earthly considerations should prevent her returning as soon as possible, the widow had become too warmly attached to her gentle and agreeable guest to contemplate this departure without the most dreary forebodings.

It was not so with Philip. He was sorry, very sorry to lose Carry, "his own good Carry," even for a few weeks; but having once made up his mind that she should be his wife, he would not burden his mind with apprehensions about maternal opposition or any other obstacles whatever. His "I will" was in this case to be omnipotent, and to afford him relief and consolation under all the pangs which earthly partings are so eminently calculated to inspire.

But then, (as Mrs. Forrest could not help half tremblingly reflecting, on the evening after Caroline's departure,) this second love was not as the first had been. Carry was a dear, amiable, prepossessing girl; but she was not Theresa.

"And so," said the beautiful Mrs. Ashton, when she had welcomed her daughter rather coldly, kissed her pale cheek, and scanned, somewhat contemptuously, the unpretending style of her toilette—"and so, Miss Caroline, you have been playing the diplomatist, have you,—and in true Quixotic style, too,—not for yourself, but for your friend. Mrs. Lumley may well be proud of such a pupil. I really had no idea of the extent and versatility of your talents. Of course you will manage to secure a duke, at least, for yourself, having obtained a baronet's son for Miss Berrington. Who have you in view, my dear, that I may treat him with all becoming graciousness?"

Caroline only replied to this agreeable address by saying, as she quietly laid aside her shawl and bonnet—

"Have you seen Lady Singleton, mamma?"

"Yes," replied the mother, sharply, irritated at having failed to provoke her

daughter; "and she has told me all about your visit to Burnham Park, where, it seems, you made so favourable an impression—on everybody but the right person—that they want you there again. Janet has asked me to live with them altogether; and as my income would be insufficient to procure me a comfortable home of my own, I think it extremely probable that I shall do so."

"I thought Lawrence and his wife were to reside for some time at Burnham Park," said Caroline. "Would not three distinct families be rather too much under one roof?"

"I have nothing to do with Lawrence or his wife," replied Mrs. Ashton, haughtily, "and shall certainly suit my own convenience, without any reference to them."

As Caroline offered no further remark, her mother presently continued—

"They have asked me to go into the country with them next month, and to

bring you too. I hope you have some decent dresses, as a large party is expected for the shooting season."

"They are very kind," said Caroline: "but I hope, mamma, you will permit me to decline going for the present. I should not like meeting a large party so soon after papa's death."

The widow only smiled contemptuously, as she answered—

"And pray where do you propose taking up your abode when I leave town? Has any person solicited the honour of your society?"

"I should like to return to Elderton."

"To Elderton!" almost screamed Mrs. Ashton—"to that miserable, half-savage, heathenish, outlandish sort of place; and to that weary, dreary, solemn, lachrymose Mrs. Forrest? Why, what, in the name of all that's wonderful, do you want to be doing there? I shouldn't be surprised to hear next that there's some boorish lover in the case—a farmer's son, perhaps, with

rosy cheeks and yellow hair—a youth who takes his own corn to market, and despises fashion and high life as much as you do. Eh, Caroline! have you such a son-in-law prepared for me?"

"Not quite answering your lively description, mamma, but one who assuredly cares even less than myself for the hollow conventionalities of the world—one who loves Elderton as much as you dislike it—and, finally, one who is nearly related to Mrs. Forrest herself."

Caroline spoke fearlessly, though without the least appearance of disrespect. She felt annoyed, and even wounded, by the sarcastic tone in which her mother had all along addressed her; but she wished rather to conceal than exhibit these feelings—rather to deprecate than increase the ill-temper of her companion.

The latter, however, had quite made up her mind to be displeased at everything; and to her daughter's suggestive more than explanatory speech, she replied, with angry bitterness—

"I thought so. I could have declared that you and that lack-a-daisical Mrs. Forrest would have managed to get up a piece of sentiment between you. And pray, what are the details of this highly interesting case, or am I still to be kept in the dark concerning them?"

Caroline gave her mother a brief account of her engagement, of Philip's prospects, of his declining to accept his freedom on learning her comparative poverty, and of Mrs. Forrest's refusal to sanction the attachment definitely, until Mrs. Ashton's consent should be obtained. In conclusion, Caroline added, that although she certainly would not act in opposition to her mother's wishes, she felt it right to state, that if she did not marry Philip, she should never marry at all. The little money she possessed would suffice to maintain her respectably; and, should Mrs. Ashton decide upon living with the Singletons, she doubted not that her old governess would receive her, and she should en-

deavour to make herself as happy as possible, and to forget that a more pleasing prospect had ever been presented to her view.

Mrs. Ashton listened to all this with a highly meritorious patience. She even smiled once or twice during the course of the narrative; and, when her daughter had finished, and was looking at her with a subdued but still unmistakeable anxiety, she laughed outright, and said, almost good-humouredly—"Really, Caroline, it is worth the sacrifice of many long cherished anticipations to see a piece of marble like yourself in love. We will make a compromise, my dear. You shall accompany me to Burnham Park—be introduced to a few really eligible men—have an opportunity of comparing this all-conquering hero of yours with others of a different stamp; and then, if he still maintains his ground in your esteem and admiration, I will make no effort to trouble the course of such true and disinterested love. I will

receive Philip Maranham as a son-in-law. Is this too hard for you, Caroline?"

"Mamma, it is for you to dictate your terms. I could have wished to avoid this visit to Burnham Park; but I certainly shall not refuse to accompany you."

"Very well, then, that matter is settled. And now we had better go and make ourselves presentable, as my lawyer, who has just lost his wife, dines here to-day."

And so this first important interview between the mother and daughter ended.

Upon reflection, Caroline was not sorry that she had agreed to go to Burnham Park. She recollected that Theresa and her husband would arrive there about the end of October; and she thought it very probable that her mother would try to make the former pay dearly for the unpardonable crime of being Mrs. Lawrence Singleton. She knew, too, Theresa's timid nature; and feared that if some friend were not at hand to smooth the first difficulties of the young wife's introduction into her hus-

band's family, all sorts of evils might arise; and Caroline's natural anxiety for her friend's happiness was, in this case, increased tenfold, by the consciousness that she had been one of the chief promoters of her marriage with Lawrence.

All this she dwelt upon in her letters to Philip and his aunt, and they both agreed in warmly commending her thoughtfulness for Theresa, at the same time that they lamented sincerely being deprived of the pleasure of her society. Neither of them doubted for a moment the result of the ordeal Mrs. Ashton imposed on her daughter; for although, as Philip modestly said. Caroline might see hundreds far worthier and more fascinating than himself, she was too cold to be in any danger of losing her heart, and too conscientious to give a thought to any save the man whom she had voluntarily agreed to marry.

The month the Ashtons remained in London was not altogether an unpleasant one to Caroline. Her mother left her un-

disputed mistress of her time, and she derived very great enjoyment from visiting her old school, or rather home, at Fairfield House, and renewing her acquaintance with many of the friends she had left behind her there.

Neither was Mrs. Darlington forgotten; and as this latter agreeable personage was very fond of Miss Ashton, she insisted upon a considerable share of her society; and if Caroline neglected her for a day or two, the little widow would be certain to call at Mrs. Ashton's lodgings, and carry off her old acquaintance, even by force if it was required.

On one of these occasions, Lady Singleton being present, Caroline introduced the stylish looking Isabel as Theresa's cousin, whereupon the gracious mother-in-law hoped that Mrs. Darlington would honour Burnham Park with a visit some time during the ensuing autumn, and the lively Isabel replied that she seldom left her own home, but that perhaps within the

next hundred years she might avail herself of Lady Singleton's polite and friendly invitation.

To Caroline she afterwards said—"If it would ever be any pleasure or comfort to Tessie to have me there, I shall certainly make a point of going; but to tell you the truth, my dear, there's a fine ladyism about Lawrence Singleton's mother which makes me suspect that she and I shall be just as well apart. I don't half like the thoughts of poor Tessie being caged up with such a set."

Caroline suggested that, having her husband constantly with her, Theresa could scarcely be exposed to any serious annoyances from his family; but to this Isabel only replied significantly, and with a foreboding sigh—"Books, my dear, books!"

At the end of August, the Singletons, accompanied by Mrs. Ashton and her daughter, and a whole host of sporting characters, took their flight from London, and established themselves for the autumn and winter at Burnham Park.

CHAPTER VII.

CAROLINE'S ordeal was over—or rather, the time allowed for its duration was over; for, strictly speaking, ordeal there had been none. Lady Singleton's male guests had all agreed in pronouncing Miss Ashton "a fine girl," "a clever girl," and even "a deucedly agreeable girl"—but not one of them had gone beyond this; and although Caroline herself was neither surprised nor disappointed, her mother—unaccustomed to the English world, accustomed to see young ladies, with far less attractions than her daughter, eagerly sought in marriage by men of wealth and station—was astonished and indignant in no slight degree.

There was no redress, however—no help for it. The fact stood out in all its bareness, and no closing of the eyes would

alter its aspect or its position the least bit in the world.

And what now remained to be considered? — what cheering prospect was there behind this dreary foreground?

Philip Maranham for a son-in-law,—or an old maid, with very limited means, for a daughter!

Mrs. Ashton decided upon the former; and as she made Janet the recipient of all her domestic troubles, the latter, considerately, sent a pressing invitation to Philip to repair immediately to Burnham Park, for the purpose of being introduced to his future mother-in-law, and spending a few weeks in the society of his amiable *fiancée*.

Caroline hoped and expected that he would decline attending this summons. She had no absolute fears concerning his meeting Theresa; but there was an instinctive feeling of propriety about her, which suggested that it would be desirable that the waters of oblivion should have more time to roll over the past, ere he exposed himself to the

constant society of one who had so very recently possessed his entire affections.

Philip, however, apparently had different ideas on the subject, for the invitation was promptly accepted; and, in less than a fortnight after it had been dispatched, Caroline's future husband, accompanied by his four-footed satellites, made his appearance at Burnham Park, and received, with all due gratitude, Mrs. Ashton's permission to make love to her daughter.

As the family were quite alone when Philip arrived—the other guests having taken their departure until the Christmas gaieties should recall them—the addition of this lively young man to their quiet circle formed a pleasing and welcome variety. They all thought him—Mrs. Ashton not excepted—an agreeable, likeable person; but none of them discovered anything out of the common way in him—anything to account for the partiality of a grave, sensible, stoic-hearted girl like Caroline.

Neither was the phenomenon to be explained on the grounds of Philip's ardent devotion to her; for although he evidently found pleasure in the society of his betrothed, and paid her all those little attentions which their acknowledged position demanded, still, nobody, seeing them constantly together, could entertain an idea that he was either a passionate or an idolizing lover.

What was it then? Where did the mystery of this attachment lay? The questions were plain and distinct enough, but no satisfactory answers could be found for them. The subject, however, sufficed to occupy and amuse the minds of Caroline's friends during all the first week of Philip's visit, and might have done so much longer, had not a letter from Lawrence, naming an early day for the arrival of himself and Theresa, effectually attracted every particle of excitement towards this new and more legitimate source of interest.

Caroline now began to watch anxiously

for the appearance of those signs in the family which might indicate to her the sort of reception Theresa was likely to meet. She observed, in the first place, that Sir James evinced little interest in the matter, beyond an occasional declaration that he should be glad to see the young folks at home again, that they must be pretty sick of foreigners and sight-seeing by this time, &c. &c. In the next place, she noticed that Lady Singleton was more than usually attentive to Mrs. Ashton—who had been particularly fretful and low-spirited from the moment Lawrence's last letter had been made public—and that the mother-in-law always avoided talking of Theresa, or asking any questions about her, when her widowed friend was in the room. Nevertheless, that Janet's curiosity and excitement concerning her new daughter were very keen indeed, and that, in spite of Mrs. Ashton's displeasure, she was eagerly anticipating the hour when her son and his young wife should arrive.

And were these all the observations that Caroline was enabled or cared to make? Was there no one else belonging to the party whose conduct she had any interest in watching? Was she really so cold, so stoical, as to be indifferent concerning the faith, and strength, and uprightness of the man she was to marry?

It was far otherwise. Not a word, not a look, not a smile of Philip's at this time escaped her watchful notice; but then her charity was large, no narrow bounds of petty jealousy confined it. The thought of measuring herself personally with Theresa never once occurred to her. In the balances which she held for her affianced husband, Caroline placed on one side his future wife, on the other the wife of Lawrence Singleton; and she doubted not that, in the end, the former would be of sufficient weight to hold down Philip's heart.

In the end? And was she, then, content to wait for this,—to endure the present bitterness of knowing herself the first, only

because honour and principle would be outraged were it otherwise,—of feeling that, could sin cease to be sin, and conscience yield its office, her place, doubtful and undefined as it was in the heart of him she loved, would be found no more, would be filled again with a lost but not a shattered idol?

Yes, Caroline was content. Her eyes were open. She had accurately estimated the cost of her present undertaking. Her

> "—— faith was large in time,
> And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

So much for her theory; but we will come now to practice, which, after all, is the only true test by which we can judge the hearts and principles of our fellow beings.

It was the day before Lawrence and Theresa were to arrive. All the party, with the exception of Mrs. Ashton, were assembled in the drawing-room, waiting the announcement of dinner, when, suddenly, Lady Singleton, throwing down a

novel she had taken up, exclaimed (addressing Philip), "By the bye, Mr. Maranham, I have never yet heard your opinion of my fair new daughter. You young men ought to be the best judges of female beauty. Do tell me, now, whether Mrs. Lawrence is really pretty and ladylike, or only one of those hoydenish country girls whose chief claims to distinction are in red cheeks and forward manners."

For a moment or two Philip seemed struggling with some great internal wrath and indignation, which would not let him speak; then, with a perfect torrent of angry impetuosity, his reply broke forth:—

"If anybody has represented Theresa to you as otherwise than most lovely in face and form,—as otherwise than most pure in heart and mind,—as otherwise than a shining angel upon earth,—Lady Singleton, that person has *lied.* I crave your pardon if I speak plainly; but there are some occasions on which it is necessary to give things their proper

names; and, I repeat, that whoever has represented your son's wife as tainted with one shadow of vulgarity, as even capable of understanding the meaning of immodesty, that person has lied; and if it was a man, I ask no greater favour than to be suffered to tell him so to his face."

Oh, foolish, foolish Philip, what is all this to you? Henceforth you will have other watchers besides Caroline—other observers of your every look and word. From the former you had nothing to dread—her indulgent tenderness would have pardoned a far heavier offence than that of justifying an absent friend; but of those curious eyes your mad folly has now directed towards you, Philip Maranham, beware!

For it was not merely Lady Singleton and her quiet husband who listened in unmingled astonishment to this animated and unscrupulous defence. Ere Philip began to speak, Mrs. Ashton had silently entered the room, and stood now an amazed auditress—it might be, of her own

condemnation. At any rate, there was something of more than common bitterness and acrimony, both in her voice and look, as she exclaimed, the moment after Philip had uttered his defiance to Theresa's imagined traducer :—

"Upon my word, Miss Ashton is peculiarly fortunate in having a lover who takes up the cudgels for her female friends in such a spirited and magnanimous manner. I wonder, Caroline, what marvels Mr. Maranham would find to say in *your* defence, when even your friend is an angel upon earth, and devoid of every imperfection usually attributed to humanity."

This sarcastic speech appeared to have the effect of recalling Philip, in some degree, to his senses; for the lowering expression of his countenance gave place to one of simple vexation at his own uncalled-for, and, certainly, ungentlemanly vehemence; and he glanced rather anxiously at Caroline, to see how she would take her mother's very cutting irony.

She was, undoubtedly, less self-possessed than usual, and there was a peculiar whiteness about her temples, which Philip had learnt to distinguish as a mark of strong agitation; but her voice was firm and cheerful, and her lips had a smile upon them, as she said, in reply to Mrs. Ashton's taunting appeal—

"I believe, mamma, that, in my defence, Philip would give me the credit of appreciating that chivalrous and noble spirit, which, fearless of all possible misconstruction, ever advocates the cause of an absent friend; and assert, moreover, that, if I am not an angel myself, I have the grace to love and admire angelic qualities in others, and a sufficient sense of justice to desire those who regard me to regard also those I love."

Lady Singleton stared at Caroline all the time she was speaking, as if her words were uttered in an unknown tongue. Sir James seized a newspaper and looked foolish, as men are apt to do when they

suspect the approach of a female war. Mrs. Ashton laughed contemptuously, and sat down by the fire; but Philip hastened across the room to Caroline, grasped her hand with grateful, earnest warmth, and exclaimed, in a voice that none could fail of hearing,—

"I should say, and do say of you, that you are more to be commended than a hundred angels; for you have a woman's nature and a woman's heart, and you have trampled under foot a woman's greatest failing. Dear Carry, I shall never be called upon to speak in your defence; for who could be jealous of one without a particle of jealousy in her own character?"

The smile with which Caroline answered this enthusiastic tribute was not altogether a glad one. Perhaps she was conscious of being still misunderstood, or of having her modest virtues over-estimated. Perhaps she looked into the future, and saw more rugged and solitary paths than she had yet accustomed herself to contemplate.

But, however this might be, she was kind and gentle as ever to Philip; and the busy watchers all agreed that, on this evening, the lovers really did appear devoted to each other.

CHAPTER VIII.

The party at Burnham Park sat waiting the arrival of Lawrence and Theresa. Dinner had been ordered an hour later than usual, to give ample time to the travellers; but, in spite of this, everybody had managed to be ready even sooner than on other days, and had entered, one by one, into the drawing-room, looking more or less anxious and excited.

They were all assembled now, and the curtains had been drawn, the fire stirred into a cheerful blaze, and plenty of wax lights dispersed about the large apartment. Mrs. Ashton hated a dark room, and Mrs. Ashton was the guest whom Janet delighted to honour.

These two sat talking together in a low voice on a comfortable little sofa that was

drawn as close as possible to the fire. Sir James had his own table and his own lamp, and his own newspaper on the opposite side; and Philip and Caroline had taken their seats near one of the windows (lovers, you know, are never cold), and were playing a game at chess.

Such were their exact positions and occupations; and a stranger, looking in, might have fancied all of them quietly engrossed with what they were about, their thoughts dutifully accompanying the movements of their tongues, eyes, and fingers.

But it was not so, as anybody who had lingered five minutes in the room must have discovered. Mrs. Ashton and Lady Singleton, though apparently in earnest conversation, often answered each other at random, or interrupted themselves, in some interesting question or reply, to listen to a fancied rolling of carriage wheels. Even Sir James found himself continually skipping long passages of the last debate, as he

mused on the probability of domestic storms, when his pretty daughter-in-law was added to the female circle. He admired Theresa immensely, and thought she was altogether a very sweet creature; but he loved peace more than anything in the world; and it had sometimes occurred to him, of late, that this was not likely to be promoted by the union of so many females under one roof. Sir James had become almost as anxious and nervous concerning the expected addition to the family as any other member of the party.

And in Philip and Caroline, though they were both so quiet and subdued, the same symptoms might be discovered. Their fingers moved mechanically,—their eyes, if they chanced to meet, dropped uneasily, —and when their lips opened, it was only to give utterance to some common-place observation, which had no other object than to break the awkard stillness that, in spite of all, would persist in creeping upon them again.

It would have been a curious study to have looked into their hearts and read the many resolutions that, during this silent hour of waiting, they both of them made —Philip to be true and firm, and unbending in his integrity and faith—Caroline to be patient, just, and charitable, in thought, word, and deed.

At length the weary waiting came to an end. Punctuality was one of Lawrence Singleton's virtues; and about ten minutes after the hour he had mentioned for their arrival, the welcome sound of wheels was heard, and all in the room, except Mrs. Ashton, moved from their places, and advanced eagerly towards the door.

Sir James and Caroline were, however, the only ones that went out into the hall to receive the travellers; and well was it for Theresa that the kind, familiar face of her old and dear friend was the first to greet her sight, as, wearied, cold, and nervous, at the thoughts of coming to reside amongst strangers, she entered timidly,

and with glistening eyes, the grand-looking home of her husband's relatives—the luxurious mansion that would one day be her own possession.

Did any idea of this sort cross Theresa's mind, as she threw her arms round Caroline's neck, and whispered, in broken sentences, her joy at seeing her friend again? Poor young wife! very different thoughts and emotions were in her heart at present; very far remote from worldly pomp and greatness were the visions that floated dimly before her mental sight. She would have been better pleased had Lawrence brought her to a humble cottage, and, pointing to its plain and simple adornments, have said, in accents of affection,—"These, these only, are mine and thine."

Sir James Singleton welcomed both his son and daughter with earnest cordiality. He saw that Theresa was nervous, and taking her from Caroline, drew her arm kindly within his own, and led her into the drawing-room.

The moment they appeared Lady Singleton came up, embraced Lawrence first, and then turned, with an encouraging smile, to the shrinking, trembling, little wife, who was still leaning on Sir James's arm.

"Here is our new daughter, my dear," said the latter, cheerfully; "but we must not keep her to be kissed and admired just now, for you see she is a delicate plant, and the fatigue of their long journey has been too much for her."

"Poor Tessie!" exclaimed Lawrence, in that sort of pitying tone we use when speaking of a child; "she has not been very well for the last month. You must take care of her, mother."

Theresa looked round to smile gratefully upon her husband; but she was now growing quite confused, and, after receiving Lady Singleton's condescending kiss upon her forehead, she murmured something about wishing to change her travelling dress, and made a few hesitating steps towards the still open door.

"Miss Ashton will like to show you to your room, I am sure," said Janet, taking her daughter-in-law's trembling hand; "but here is an old acquaintance you must speak to first—two old acquaintances, indeed; for, if I mistake not, you and Mrs. Ashton have met before."

The mention of Caroline's mother was not exactly calculated to restore Theresa's self-possession. She had no idea of finding this lady at Burnham Park. She had never forgotten, never *could* forget, the impression Mrs. Ashton made upon her during the few minutes they were together in Mrs. Forrest's parlour, at Elderton. And, now, to hear suddenly that she was a guest in the house of her husband's parents—in the house that was to be her own home—was it not enough to drive every particle of colour from her cheek and to fill her heart with the most saddening anticipations?

Hitherto Theresa had not looked beyond the spot where Lady Singleton had ad-

vanced to meet her; but as the latter now drew her towards the fire-place, she raised her eyes and beheld Mrs. Ashton and Philip Maranham sitting, side by side, on the little sofa.

"Mrs. Lawrence must forgive me for not rising," said the former, with a sort of careless politeness that *might* have been intended to put Theresa at her ease, and remove any suspicion of ceremonious coldness from her greeting. "I am really such an old woman now that I must have my privileges. I hope you are quite well, my dear. But never mind me. Here is a much older friend dying to shake hands with you."

Philip had been very, very patient—a perfect martyr, indeed—as Mrs. Ashton, no doubt, would have been able to testify; but now that his turn was fairly come, he thought himself justified in pressing, with cordial friendliness, the small hand that was so frankly offered to him, and in saying that he felt the sincerest pleasure in seeing Mrs. Lawrence Singleton once more.

"And I am truly rejoiced to meet you again, Philip," replied Theresa, with simple earnestness. "Oh! you must have so much to tell me about my dear Mrs. Forrest. I shall claim a large portion of your time to-morrow."

"There—run away, run away, now, Tessie, dear," said Lawrence, coming up to speak to Mrs. Ashton and Philip. "You will never be ready for dinner if you stay gossipping in this manner. Your friend is waiting for you by the door."

Theresa required no second warning. In a moment she was at Caroline's side; and as they hastened together through the long passages and up the wide staircase of the cold, but magnificent house, the young wife looked around her and sighed heavily, as she said—

"Oh, Carry! this does not seem like *home!*"

CHAPTER IX.

After this, Caroline was the principal talker, for Theresa, overpowered by bodily fatigue, and oppressed by the uncongenial grandeur of her new residence, felt little inclined for conversation, and would have been thankful to have crept away to her quiet bed, without meeting any of the people down stairs again that evening.

But as this was out of the question, she made haste to complete her toilette, and scarcely casting one look into the glass, (which, tired as she was, would have told her a very flattering tale), announced to Caroline that she was quite ready, and hoped she was sufficiently dressed to accord with the taste of her husband's relatives.

"You could not look better," replied Miss Ashton with perfect sincerity. "I

really think, Theresa, you are prettier than ever."

"Oh, what nonsense, Caroline. I am quite unused to flattery now, and you must not spoil me again."

"What, does not your husband talk this nonsense, as you call it, to you still!"

"Lawrence? Oh, no—he has no time for anything of that sort—but I do not require it from him. His love is quite enough for me, far more than I shall ever deserve."

"Well, to-morrow I must hear all the news, Theresa. We will take a long walk together, if your husband will spare you."

Theresa laughed, though not quite so joyously as she used to do. "Oh," she said, "he will be glad of somebody to take me off his hands, now we have not got Arthur Cressingham; but the question will be whether Philip can spare *you*—your 'man in the moon,' Carry; what a funny idea that was."

Caroline did not reply to this, as they were now at the drawing room door. She

pressed Theresa's hand and told her to be courageous, and then they went in together.

As dinner was announced almost at the same moment, Sir James took his fair daughter under his protection, and, placing her near himself at the table, did all he could to make her feel at home, and to dissipate that girlish shyness from which he saw she was so keenly suffering.

Lady Singleton addressed a few remarks to Theresa at the beginning of dinner, but Mrs. Ashton always claimed so much of her attention that she had very little to bestow elsewhere; and finding that both Sir James and Miss Ashton were disposed to entertain the stranger, she soon left the task entirely to them, contenting herself with gazing at her son's wife in a manner that was too expressive of curiosity to be very agreeable to Theresa.

There was one other person at table whose eyes did not appear entirely under his own control, and who, though he scarcely spoke at all, could by no means

be accused of neglecting Mrs. Lawrence Singleton. He seemed, indeed, to be sitting at table for the express purpose of anticipating her wants; and, notwithstanding the very quiet and unobtrusive manner in which it was all done, Mrs. Ashton would not let it pass, and on one occasion she remarked pointedly,—

"Any one would suppose that Mr. Maranham and Mrs. Lawrence were brother and sister. He appears so much at home in waiting upon her."

Philip's cheek flushed deeply, but he made no reply. Lawrence looked round at his wife, smiled kindly, and said,—

"Tessie always finds somebody to atone to her for her careless husband's neglect. At Geneva, there was Cressingham, who really devoted himself to her. By the bye (turning to his father), I have asked him here for Christmas. The ladies will be sure to like him."

Caroline looked at Lady Singleton, who smiled, and assured her son that any friend

of his would be welcome at Burnham Park. Sir James repeated the same, and soon after this the mistress of the mansion gave the signal for leaving the table, and Caroline and Theresa followed the two elder ladies into the drawing-room.

To young Mrs. Singleton the evening appeared very long and wearisome; not that her new relations neglected her, for this certainly was far from being the case. But there was something in the notice she received, particularly from her mother-in-law, that suggested an idea of patronage and condescension, which even the humble minded Theresa was not disposed to admire.

But there were others who enjoyed themselves more, and amongst these her own husband, who, having prevailed on Caroline to play and sing to him, sat listening in entranced delight, forgetting everything but the refined pleasure he was experiencing, and the gifted individual who had the power of bestowing it upon him.

But after awhile Miss Ashton rose from the piano, and going up to Theresa, who was seated between Philip and Lady Singleton, said coaxingly,—

"Come, my little idle pupil, we must have a specimen of *your* musical abilities now. I have a nice easy song that will just suit your voice."

"Oh, pray do sing to us, if you can," said Janet, as if she had never dreamt before of the possibility of Theresa doing anything. "I am sure we shall be delighted to hear you."

"But, indeed, I cannot," replied the daughter as firmly as her trembling voice would permit her to speak. "Dear Caroline, how can you ask me?"

"Mrs. Lawrence Singleton has an exquisite voice," put in Philip abruptly; "but I think it would be cruel to require her to exert it to-night."

"What's the matter with my little wife?" asked Lawrence, advancing slowly towards the group. "You must not let her

talk too much, mother; she is very far from strong."

"I wanted her to sing to you," said Caroline; "but my persuasions have been ineffectual, and I have been accused of cruelty for making such a request."

"Oh," said Lawrence, putting back Theresa's hair, and looking affectionately into her pale, weary face, "Tessie does not sing in public yet. She has a nice little voice, but it will not do after Miss Ashton's. She is very tired, mother; you should make her go to bed."

Before Lady Singleton could reply, Theresa had risen from her seat; and saying that, if the former would excuse her, she would gladly follow her husband's suggestion, she hastened to bid everybody good night, and moved, with partially recovered animation, towards the door.

Thus far Lawrence had accompanied her, but here he paused; and after kissing his young wife with a tenderness that even Caroline could find no fault with, and

which she wished ardently the sceptical cousin Isabel, could have seen, he left her to proceed alone to her room, and returned to beg Miss Ashton for one more song.

The remainder of the evening was dull enough for everybody except Lawrence. Philip sat by himself, looking cross and feeling indignant with Caroline for devoting herself to the amusement of Theresa's selfish husband. Sir James had resumed his reading, and took no notice of any of the party. Mrs. Ashton watched her daughter and Lawrence, and told Janet she must have been a sad bungler not to have managed matters better than she had done. And Janet bit her lips and declared it was very hard that she should not only be forced to receive a little, half-educated, country girl for a daughter-in-law, but be abused for the very thing she would have given her right hand to prevent.

When Lawrence released Caroline, the latter went up to Philip, and, holding out her hand, said, in her usual tone—

"Good night, Philip."

"Oh, you are going, are you?" he replied, detaining her hand for a moment. "Another time don't leave me so long to my own thoughts. They are not always pleasant ones, Carry; and when your influence is withdrawn, evil will occasionally mingle with the bitter."

"Good night, Philip," she said again, as kindly and placidly as before.

"Is that all, Carry? Have I, then, sinned past redemption?"

"Good night, *dear* Philip," she repeated. And this time he was satisfied; and drawing her hand to his lips, kissed it with a sort of reverential affection, and suffered her to leave the room.

CHAPTER X.

The next morning, at breakfast, Lady Singleton told Theresa she would walk with her through the grounds; and although Theresa had hoped to have Caroline for a companion, she was, of course, obliged to be duly grateful for the honour intended her, and to acquiesce silently in this arrangement.

"And what are you going to do, Lawrence," continued the mother, addressing her very grave looking son, who had not uttered a word from the moment he sat down to table.

"You must give me a room to myself, where I shall be quite secure from any possible interruption," he said, in reply to this question. "My wife will tell you that I am a most unsociable being, and quite

capable of providing for my own amusement."

"Ah!" exclaimed his father, laughing. "I'll answer for it, Mrs. Lawrence has learnt to shudder at the very sight of a book. For my part, I cannot understand how you ever found time to make love; though, I confess my young friend here is charming enough to convert St. Anthony himself into a lover."

Theresa blushed very prettily, and Lawrence looked at her admiringly for a moment. Then he repeated his demand for a study; and, on receiving assurance that he could have one, resumed his breakfast and his grave demeanour, and spoke no more to any body.

Theresa, instructed by her amiable mother-in-law—Janet was really in a good temper this morning—went upstairs to prepare for the walk as soon as they all rose from table; and, on coming down again, her anticipations of enjoyment were not increased by finding that Mrs. Ashton was to accompany them.

"And you, Carry?" she said, looking wistfully at the latter, who was sitting by the window painting a flower. "Do not you walk, this fine day?"

"Yes," replied Caroline, "I am going out, by and bye, with Philip and the dogs—your old acquaintances, Tantalus and Charon, Theresa."

"Oh! how nice," said Mrs. Lawrence, naturally; but blushing vehemently the next instant when she saw Mrs. Ashton curl her lip, and look in a significant manner at Lady Singleton.

It was really a splendid morning, and though quite the end of October, the sun shone with cheering warmth as well as brightness, and the richly planted grounds of Burnham Park were displayed to admirable advantage.

Philip and Caroline enjoyed their walk exceedingly. The former had quite recovered his spirits and his good temper, and appeared more than usually devoted to his companion. He talked of returning

to Elderton the following week, as Mrs. Forrest complained of her loneliness; and he thought, as the beginning of the spring had been fixed for his marriage with Caroline, he ought to devote as much time as possible to his aunt, previous to this event, when it would be indispensable for them to reside in London.

Caroline was quite of the same opinion, and only regretted that she, too, could not return to dear, quiet Elderton—having promised, at her mother's request, to stay at Burnham Park until the family left it, after Christmas, for the London season.

The lovers were strolling on gently, talking of their future plans, occasionally stopping to say a word to Philip's dogs, who gambolled delighted at their side, occasionally to admire the rich autumn tints of the stately trees around them, when a sudden turning in one of the winding shrubbery paths brought them face to face with Theresa and her two companions.

She was walking between them, looking

like a fair lily of the valley enclosed by two fine garden roses. And what a sad, tired, melancholy expression sat on her sweet, madonna countenance; how wistfully and yearningly she gazed at Caroline and Philip, during the few minutes that they all stopped to chat; and how suggestive of the thraldom to which she was, perhaps unconsciously, yielding, were the few timid words of greeting that she addressed to Tantalus and Charon, as they bounded joyfully towards her, with unmistakeable tokens of recognition.

"Those women will kill her," exclaimed Philip, with passionate indignation, almost before they could be out of hearing. "Never say again that I cannot command my feelings, Carry, for I swear to you that I was *sick* with the desire of telling those two fine, mincing ladies that they were brutes."

"One of whom happens to be my mother," said Caroline, drily.

"Well, I beg your pardon; but a man must speak sometimes. Can't you see,

yourself, that they mean to persecute that poor girl to death, with their pretended kindness?—that they will imprison both her soul and body?—that she is to have no feelings, no will, no desires of her own? What a selfish fool her husband must be to bring her here to live! He knew his mother never liked the match; and he might know, if he would use his eyes, that *your* mother has a deadly enmity against her for occupying the position she intended for you. Yes, I could forgive all of them sooner than him. Lawrence Singleton had no right to such a wife. And then, to see how she is wrapt up in him!"

"We should not include her devotion in the evils of the case," replied Caroline, gravely. "This love, if it continue as warm and deep as it is at present, will atone to her for many of the discomforts of her position. Besides, dear Philip, you are inclined to exaggerate these discomforts. Theresa has been terribly bored this morning, I do not doubt; but both mamma and

Lady Singleton will soon have satiated their curiosity, and then they will leave her in peace. I regret that the poor girl has so little spirit; but even this may turn to her advantage by and by."

"Well, well, Carry, it is easy and pleasant to prophesy smooth things; but I repeat again that Lawrence Singleton had no right to such a wife, and that, if he really has one spark of affection for her, the day will come when he will lament, in dust and ashes, for having appropriated to himself a flower that he has no skill to tend."

Caroline said nothing more on the subject; but the enjoyment of their walk was over, and they returned home in almost unbroken silence.

* * * * *

In a few days the excitement attending the arrival of the young couple at Burnham Park had entirely subsided, and everything was going on as quietly and monotonously as before. Lawrence had his study to himself, and kept aloof from

the rest of the party during the whole morning and afternoon. Theresa certainly had the privilege of obtruding upon him; but, as she used it sparingly, it was presumed that her visits did not receive much encouragement from her studious husband

So the young, docile wife remained as patiently as she could in the grand drawing-room, receiving lectures from Janet, on becoming, matronly conduct,—enduring hints from Mrs. Ashton, concerning Philip's extraordinary devotion,—or assisting in entertaining the prosy country gossips who soon poured in, to see and criticise the face, form, dress, and manners of Mrs. Lawrence Singleton.

But what was Caroline doing all this time? Did she lack the power or the will to smooth the difficulties of Theresa's path, and to brighten, in some degree, the weary present?

Caroline did what she could—that is to say, as much as human nature could be expected to do. She was unvaryingly kind

and attentive to Theresa herself; she never *appeared* to notice, or care for, her mother's cruel insinuations respecting Philip's conduct; she zealously defended the young wife, whenever the slightest imputation was breathed against her; and, more than all, she cautiously guarded her own thoughts from the intrusion of one jealous or resentful feeling. Not that Theresa did anything to inspire the latter, for no living being, with common perception, could avoid seeing her deep and entire devotion to her husband; but women are rarely quite just in matters of this nature, and very few have the charity to ascribe perfect innocence to the object who robs them of a single smile or sigh to which they have a prior claim.

Philip had somewhat over-rated his strength of mind, or trusted too much to that purity of principle which, unsupported by religion, will ever prove but a feeble adversary against human passion. He could not live in daily intercourse with

Theresa without showing in a hundred ways the deep and intense interest he still felt in her every word, and look, and movement. He could not witness her frequent dejection without venting his indignation on everybody whom he suspected of being in the smallest degree concerned in occasioning it. He struggled, certainly, with praiseworthy resolution against the exhibition of feelings of this sort, but his utmost success resolved itself into a kind of sullen depression, which was too marked to escape universal comment.

And yet—admire the inconsistency of man!—he could not bear that Caroline, even when he was in these detestable moods, should withdraw herself from him ; he felt aggrieved when, to oblige Lawrence, she spent the evening at the piano; and scrupled not to express his serious dissatisfaction if, by chance, she allowed him to perceive that *her* spirits too were drooping under the weight they had to sustain.

At length affairs came to a crisis.

One day, when Theresa had been more than usually worried, and was looking really ill and miserable, Philip suddenly entered the room where she and Caroline were sitting. The latter, however, who was employed upon some fine work, had taken her chair close to the window, and was concealed from observation by the thick-hanging draperies that were dispersed about it. At any rate, Philip did not see her, and he went up to the fire and stood for some minutes gazing at Theresa without speaking a word.

He sighed, however, profoundly, once or twice; and Theresa, in perfect innocence, asked him if anything was the matter.

"Yes," he said then, "a great deal is the matter. An old prediction of mine is verified. You are not appreciated, Theresa, —you are not happy."

"Oh, Mr. Maranham," she replied, half mournfully, half indignantly, "pray do not talk so foolishly. I am far happier than I deserve to be. I have the best, and

kindest, and dearest husband in the world. I would not change my lot for that of any created being. I am sure you mean well; but believe me I require neither sympathy nor pity. If I seem less gay than I used to be it is because I am a spoilt child; and having been accustomed all my life to the freedom of a happy home, and to run wild in the woods and fields, I cannot, in a moment, get reconciled to these stately apartments, or to the ceremonious habits which befit those who live in them. And it is so long since I have seen my dear, dear mother and father. I cannot help thinking of them sometimes. It is very foolish of me—very wrong, I dare say—but—but they were so good and kind—they loved me so——"

Poor Theresa had suffered her feelings to carry her much farther than she intended; but at this point they became overpowering, and bursting into tears she got up and hurriedly left the room.

Philip believed himself to be now alone,

and under this impression he gave way to a fit of passion that was as senseless as it was unjustifiable; and proved that his powers of self-control, if indeed they had any existence, were yet but in their infancy, and that he required for his guidance some stronger principle than had at present been implanted in his undisciplined mind.

There stood upon the richly carved mantel-piece, amongst various other rare and expensive ornaments, an antique vase, formed of some curious stone or porcelain, which it was supposed almost impossible (by any fair means) to break. Seizing this, Philip held it for an instant in his hand, and then dashed it to the ground with a force and violence that not only shivered the vase itself to atoms, but made the very room shake with the startling sound.

Caroline now rose from her seat and walked slowly towards the spot where her amiable lover was standing. Her cheek was pale, and her step less steady than usual; but her voice had far more of sor-

row than of anger it, as, laying her cold hand upon his arm, she pronounced only the single word,—

"Philip!"

There was nothing expressed in his face but sullen, angry defiance. He returned her look, and then shaking her hand almost rudely from his arm, wheeled round abruptly, and stood gazing into the rapidly dying fire.

Caroline was a brave girl, but she was but mortal after all; and the feelings that now swelled tumultuously in her heart forced those shining traitors into her eyes which might have revealed to Philip much that he did not yet half comprehend.

But his back was towards her, and he made no change in his position as he said with gloomy sarcasm,—

"I should have thought that eaves-dropping would have been beneath the dignity of a young lady from Fairfield House; but, perhaps, this was included in the bill of accomplishments."

Caroline did not answer. Perhaps she could not without betraying deeper feelings then her companion had yet seen her exhibit. However this might be, when Philip, at the end of some few minutes, turned round, with another taunt upon his lips, he found himself the sole occupant of the room.

This little scene had occurred at an early part of the day; and, in the afternoon, Caroline, who had excused herself from joining the family at luncheon, received, through one of the servants, these brief lines from Philip,—

"I am alone in the library. They are all gone out. Will you come to me, Caroline? It may be the last request I shall ever make to you.

"P. M."

In five minutes after reading this, Miss Ashton was standing at the library door, trying to tutor her features into the calm

composure she was desirous that they should express.

In two minutes more she was within the room, at Philip's side, her hand forcibly clasped in his, her eyes, in spite of every recent effort, liquid with irrepressible emotion.

For her companion was in a travelling dress, and his whole manner, look, and attitude, denoted a mingling of grief and shame and penitence, that none with a less generous heart would have permitted, (whatever he might have felt) to appear.

"I am going, Caroline," he said (for if her life had depended upon it, *she* could not immediately have spoken), "and I wished to say good bye to you, and to tell you that I am suffering as much as my bitterest enemy could desire from my insane conduct of this morning. I do not offer to release you from your engagement, because it would be a mere form of words, but if you think me irreclaimable, you will of course free yourself from the galling

yoke. I always *was* unworthy of you,—I always *shall* be. But I never intentionally deceived you, Carry; and, as I hope for salvation, I never will. I go now, because I think it right to do so. I will come here no more, unless I come as your husband. I am to be pitied, Carry, and you do pity me,—I know and see you do. Can you trust me also? Can you still trust your happiness to a weak fool, such as I am?"

Ninety women out of a hundred might have said "yes" to this question; but they would, probably, have exacted a whole legion of promises, and insisted on a multitude of hard conditions, of which the first would have been broken and the second never complied with.

Caroline answered, simply—"I can and will, Philip. My confidence in you is unshaken."

A much colder-hearted man than Philip Maranham would have been affected by such noble generosity as this. It must not, therefore, be reckoned among his weak-

nesses that, for a moment, he turned aside his head to conceal the emotion that was dimming his eyes and knocking, with an agony of self condemnation, at his heart.

"God bless you, Carry" he said, at last, wringing her hand almost wildly. "I will strive to make you happy yet."

Caroline's beautiful composure was fairly vanquished now, and she sobbed as heartily and unrestrainedly as Theresa herself could have done. But Philip had the art of soothing those he cared for in quite a magical way, and ere long the sun had dispersed the clouds, and for awhile, at least, all was clear again between this strangely assorted couple.

"Walk with me to the shrubbery-gate," said Philip, when the striking of a clock warned him that he had no more time to lose. "I have said good bye to everybody, and sent down to the village all my goods, except those poor brutes yonder. Come, Carry, and see the last of us."

It was a melancholy walk for Caroline,

and still more melancholy when, having parted from Philip, she stood alone by the little shrubbery-gate, with the yellow leaves falling and whirling around her, and the autumn wind sighing amongst the dismantled trees, watching the receding figures of a man and two noble looking dogs, as they wound slowly up the curving hill leading from Burnham Park to the village.

CHAPTER XI.

Waiting, waiting, waiting! Such is the history—the deeply significant history—of all our lives. The present cannot satisfy our wants—has no power to fill our restless hearts. We wait for something better—something which the imagination is ever shadowing forth. No matter that, as we approach it, this brilliant ignis fatuus flies again into the hazy distance,—still we wait for it—we feel that the wild craving of our souls cannot have been given us as a vain mockery—we know that there must be something beyond, something infinitely more blissful, more satisfying, than anything we have yet experienced.

And at length the knowledge comes—the strange enigma is solved. *We are waiting for eternity.* We learn that our

home is not here—that we are only pilgrims on a journey—that we are hastening onwards to a city that hath foundations—to a world where there will be no more need of waiting—where every want and desire of the immortal soul will be fully and entirely satisfied.

And when this knowledge comes—in youth or in age—at the first or the eleventh hour—our restless excitement is over. We still, indeed, wait—oh, how anxiously and yearningly!—but we wait contentedly. It is no longer a brilliant phantom that we pursue—a cheat of the beguiling imagination. It is a substantial good, a real and promised bliss, a certain inheritance.

Wretched, most wretched are those who, intoxicating themselves with the poisoned waters of earth, have their ears closed for ever against this only true and heavenly wisdom.

* * * * *

All the party at Burnham Park, except, perhaps, its quiet master, wearied more or

less of the passing hour. From the proud Lilla Ashton, with her disappointed dreams of ambition, to the studious Lawrence Singleton, with his yet unrealized dreams of fame,—all were looking into the distance, —all were anticipating something that should atone to them for the unsatisfying nature of the things that were.

And there were two amongst them whose visions embraced so much of pure, innocent happiness,—happiness rather to be conferred on others than enjoyed themselves, —whose yearnings were so free from the grosser taint of earthliness, so full of that earnest love which hopeth and endureth all things, that it would seem hard and cruel to prophesy disappointment or disenchantment for them.

And yet, did not their own hearts, at times, forebode it?

Listen for a moment to what they say.

It was a cold November morning, the sky all grey and clouded, the earth shrouded in a damp, unwholesome fog, everything

in nature seeming oppressed by some ungenial influence, which forbade alike the kindling of a human hope and the rising of a blade of grass.

The India-nurtured Mrs. Ashton groaned in spirit at the aspect of the weather, and declined leaving her room; and it being decidedly the warmest and most comfortable in the house, Janet had no objection to stay and entertain her there. Sir James preferring exercise, had ridden out to inspect his farms. Lawrence was buried, as usual, amongst his books, which were meat, drink, fire, and clothing to him; and thus Caroline and Theresa had the rare privilege of spending the morning together, and of talking over old, bygone times.

Endeavouring to cheer each other in predicting bright days to come—preaching that hope which their own hearts were so slow to feel.

"For you, Carry," said Theresa, as she sat leaning her mournful little face against

the panelled wall,—"for you there must be happiness in store. You will marry a man you love; you will enjoy his constant society; you will have a home, however small, to yourselves; and you will be free to invite to that home whomsoever you please. You will not be separated altogether from those whom, after your husband, you most love on earth; you will not have to pine for the familiar faces of your childhood and youth. Oh, Carry, yours will be a blessed lot."

"Who can tell that, Theresa?" replied Caroline, with grave seriousness. "We may have all the elements of perfect enjoyment within our reach, and yet lack the wisdom which will alone enable us to grasp the treasure, and keep it in our hearts and homes. We my pass our whole lives in striving after one object, which, did we but know the talismanic word of invocation, would rise in a single instant at our summons, as the genii to the possessor of the wonderful lamp. I don't know why I

should expect, any more than my neighbours, to pluck this branch from the tree of knowledge; but I do know, that if I miss it, my life will be a woeful one."

"But you are so clever, Caroline, so wise, and so good and patient, too, that there will be little chance of your failing to secure whatever is necessary for happiness. Your husband will be proud of you—you will enter into all his pursuits. It is a sad thing, Caroline, to have no gifts of genius—to be just tolerated by those you love, as a tender-hearted, inoffensive little thing."

The look of child-like humility that accompanied these words would have been quite touching, even without the pathetic tone in which they were spoken. Caroline took up the small hand that was playing listlessly with her apron tassels, and fixing her serious eyes on Theresa's face, said earnestly—

"You wrong your husband—you do, indeed, Theresa. I have watched him

steadily and well. I *know* that he loves you with his whole heart and soul—that he thinks more highly of you than of any living being—that, in spite of the absorbing nature of his present pursuits, you are rarely absent from his thoughts; and that whatever you told him was essential to your happiness he would unhesitatingly do, even were it to leave Burnham Park for ever, and live under the shadow of your father's garden wall. Tell him frankly that you would like a home of your own—that you would wish occasionally to see your parents—that this fine house has no attractions for you—and I'll answer for Lawrence gratifying all your wishes, to the very utmost of his power."

It was interesting and affecting to see the changes of the young wife's speaking countenance while Caroline was thus addressing her—to see how every feature glowed with radiant delight, when her husband's love was insisted on, and how sublimely indignant she looked, at the

very idea of giving utterance to any wish that might not be in accordance with that of her worshipped Lawrence.

"Oh," she exclaimed energetically, when the other paused, "if I were indeed certain that what you say is true, nothing in the world, no restraint, no trials to which I could possibly be subjected, would extort from me a single murmur. It is the fear I have that Lawrence wearies of a wife so deficient in mental endowments, that makes every trifling annoyance appear grievous to me. Dearest Caroline, do you really believe he cares for me as you say?"

"I am sure of it. So if this alone has frightened the roses from your cheek, Theresa, summon them back as quickly as possible, for never was any apprehension so entirely without foundation. Lawrence has an intellect that demands constant employment, that will be ministered to, or die. But he has also a heart on which 'my little wife' is inscribed in living letters, whose vitality will endure through-

out all time. Be content: you have your full share of love."

At this moment the clock struck, and Theresa, smiling now through glad tears, sprang from her chair, and saying, "It is time for me to carry Lawrence his glass of wine," ran lightly and with almost childish glee from the room.

* * * * * *

At length the Christmas guests began to arrive, and amongst the very first came Arthur Cressingham, — the Honourable Arthur Cressingham,—eldest son of a peer of the realm, heir to about fifteen thousand a year, and the handsomest man in England.

Everything at Burnham Park now put on a festive dress; its gloom and coldness had all departed, its very stateliness was diminished by the laughing groups that assembled in the lofty rooms; and in lieu of Sir James Singleton's unmusical snore (which had been for the last few months a regular after dinner treat), sounds of

mirth and gaiety echoed nightly through the strangely altered house.

Mrs. Ashton no longer found the cold insupportable, nor the time hang heavy on her hands. Janet had no more leisure to tutor her daughter-in-law, nor to lounge in her friend's dressing room. Sir James had to abandon his paper and his quiet corner, and Caroline and Theresa had neither of them a moment they could call their own.

Lawrence only, amongst the entire household, remained unmoved by the general commotion, and continued to pursue, in his beloved studio, the labours that were to crown his pale brow with the laurel wreath, and to give him a name to which posterity should yield stedfast homage.

He never recollected that this apparent desertion of his young and beautiful wife exposed her, at the very least, to the gallantries and outward devotions of any or all of the idle men who surrounded her. He appeared quite ignorant that a married

woman, *unsupported by her husband*, is far more liable to advances from the other sex than the most desperate *un*married coquette in the world. He had certainly forgotten all about Arthur Cressingham's former admiration of Theresa, or this lonely student must have been that phenomenon of modern times — a believer in female purity—an unsuspicious husband!

It is true that Theresa was never so happy as when she could steal away for a minute or two from the noisy people up stairs, and creep into the quiet study, where, sitting on a stool at her husband's feet, she could watch him as he wrote, and sometimes win a passing smile from those grave and silent lips. The hour when he allowed her to bring him his glass of wine and bit of bread was, to Theresa, by far the most delightful of any in the day; for at this time he would throw aside his pen, and abandon himself, for a brief space, to the charms of his young wife's society. Sometimes he would make her talk of his

mother's guests—of what she did while absent from him. Sometimes he would let her look over his scrawling manuscripts, and amuse herself in trying to comprehend the unintelligible mysteries they referred to. But oftener he would keep her on the low footstool, her fair head resting against his knees, her hand clasped tenderly in his, and encourage her to talk on any subject that entered into her foolish little brain.

But this was only during one hour out of the fourteen or fifteen that Theresa was condemned to pass amongst persons who lived but for their own amusement, and whose notions of morality and virtue were certainly not severe.

When Lawrence joined the party in the evening, he always found his wife monopolized by the youngest and gayest men in the room; but, far from being uneasy at this circumstance, he only looked on and smiled, leaving her in the midst of her admirers; while he himself took a seat near the piano, and paid court to whatever

lady happened to be the St. Cecilia of the minute.

But it must not be imagined that everybody at Burnham Park was equally indifferent and unsuspicious concerning the devotion that Theresa inspired. Mrs. Ashton, for instance, was too young and handsome herself, and had been too much accustomed to universal homage, to endure patiently the admiration bestowed upon this little, presumptuous nobody; and even had the proud Lilla owed the rector's daughter no other grudge, she would have found here ample cause for enmity and dislike.

The constant, though always quiet and guarded, attentions of the fascinating Arthur Cressingham to Mrs. Lawrence Singleton appeared to excite the particular indignation of Caroline's mother, and to form the point of a meditated attack when all her weapons should be in order. In the mean time she ventured upon a few stray arrows, which sometimes missed and sometimes hit the mark.

It happened, one day, that the little dog which Lawrence had bought for his wife at Geneva was suddenly missing, and poor Theresa, who cherished it as her husband's gift, was beyond measure afflicted at the circumstance. Two or three of the servants had been dispatched in search of it through the gardens and shrubberies, but they returned without success; and somebody observing that it was highly probable these emissaries had contented themselves with examining one path—the day being bitterly cold, and a thick snow falling—Theresa immediately sprang up, declaring she would go out herself and look everywhere for "the darling."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Lady Singleton, almost sharply; "you would be certain to catch your death such weather as this. I dare say the creature will come back; and if it doesn't, Lawrence can buy you another. It is positively wicked to make such a fuss about a dog."

The tears rushed to Theresa's eyes, but

she sat still and said no more about poor Fannan.

This had occurred two or three hours before dinner; and when they were all going to sit down to table, that same evening, it was discovered that Arthur Cressingham was not amongst the party. Lady Singleton sent up to his room, but the servant returned with no better success than had attended the search after Fannan. It was certainly a second case of mysterious disappearance, and formed a very interesting and exciting topic of conversation to his wondering friends, while the first course remained on the table.

Some of the young ladies were quite pathetic on the subject, suggesting that he might have gone out and perished in the snow-storm; and one fair girl, who was thought to have a more than common partiality for the honorable Arthur, had actually given several indications of approaching hysterics, and was just on the point of rushing from the room to conceal

her emotion, when the door, being flung open, gave admittance to both the lost sheep—the handsome Arthur Cressingham (looking little the worse for the cold to which he had been exposed), bearing the pretty, curly-haired, shivering Fannan in his arms.

All questions, exclamations, and congratulations were suspended, while he carried the dog to its delighted and grateful mistress, and, disclaiming her eager thanks, declared that he was more than rewarded by the pleasure he had been happy enough to confer upon her.

But as soon as this little scene was over, the young ladies pounced on the conquering hero like so many bees; and, as one and all moved their chairs to make room for him, a considerable degree of confusion ensued, and it appeared doubtful whether the object of such flattering attention would succeed in getting any place at all.

While this was going on, Mrs. Ashton silently prepared one of her sharpest

arrows. Turning to Lawrence, who sat next to her, she said, in a half jesting, half serious tone—

"It is fortunate for your pretty wife that we are a thoroughly English party, or the refined gallantry of that gay young man might excite unpleasant comments. All other nations, except our own, place unlimited faith in the French proverb, which says—"*Dans ce monde on ne donne rien pour rien.*"

Lawrence looked at the speaker for a few minutes, as if unable to comprehend the drift of her remark; but as consciousness slowly dawned upon him he smiled in his grave, placid way, and said, confidently—

"In any country, or amongst any people, Theresa would be above suspicion. The proverb you have quoted must have been born in the kingdom of darkness; but I should dispute the testimony of one whose origin was far less tinctured with satanic colours, did it bear witness against the perfect innocence and purity of my little wife."

Mrs. Ashton flushed angrily, and bit her lip with disappointed rage. But, although one arrow had fallen to the ground, she had many others in her quiver, and Theresa herself might be more vulnerable than the unworldly and calm-minded Lawrence.

About a week after this, several of the younger members of the party had been riding together in the park, and amongst these Theresa, on her own beautiful pony, which all the ladies were in love with, and all the gentlemen abused. It certainly was an obstinate little animal, and never would keep pace with the other horses, so that Mrs. Lawrence Singleton was constantly left behind the rest, to the annoyance of her various admirers.

But on this particular morning Arthur Cressingham had declared that his horse was lame; and, although the fact was perceptible to none besides himself, he persisted in keeping in the rear with Theresa; and it happened that these two entered the court yard about five minutes after their

companions, who, however, had only just dismounted when the loiterers came up.

Mrs. Ashton was enjoying the sunshine in front of the house at the time that this occurred; and, although she only looked and smiled carelessly at Theresa and her distinguised cavalier, the former soon had unmistakeable evidence that her enemy had been at work.

She was summoned, immediately after the ringing of the dressing bell that day, to a private conference in Lady Singleton's room.

CHAPTER XII.

Her ladyship was reclining in an easy chair by the fire when Theresa entered the room, and there was a look of magnificent importance in her face which seemed to say—"What a weight of awful responsibility rests on the head of a mother-in-law!"

Theresa felt rather frightened, and remained standing near the door.

"Sit down, Mrs. Lawrence," said Janet, with severe gravity. "It has become my duty to speak to you more seriously than I have hitherto been in the habit of doing."

Mrs. Lawrence trembled like a reed, but sat down as she was desired.

"I have noticed with pain and surprise," continued Janet, solemnly, "the attentions you have for some time permitted from one

of my guests. I allude to Mr. Cressingham. Knowing that this young man had been a pupil of your father's, I was willing to make every allowance. Even that affair of the dog I suffered to pass without comment: but there *are* bounds to human forbearance, and I must tell you now, that your light, thoughtless conduct, has excited universal censure, and that my son is openly laughed at as something little better than a blind fool!"

Theresa really doubted whether she had heard aright; it seemed to her that she must be in a dream. That any human being should accuse or suspect her, who so worshipped and adored her husband—whose every thought was centred in him—of conduct that the most rigid moralist could condemn, appeared too dreadful to be true—too improbable to be credited.

And yet there sat the sternly virtuous mother-in-law, gazing at her unhappy victim, waiting for the culprit's defence. To those who are conscious of entire

innocence, any attempt at personal justification appears absurd and superfluous.

Theresa, though her cheeks were flushed to the deepest crimson, said not a word in deprecation of the grave charges brought against her. What could she say of herself, of her pure and perfect love for Lawrence, that his mother did not already know? But Arthur Cressingham had been implicated in the accusations, and him she felt bound to defend.

Sweet, innocent child; how pure and unsullied was her nature; how utterly ignorant she was of the ways of that wicked world in which her lot had been cast. How suggestive of her own guileless simplicity were the arguments she employed in defending the man whose homage she was said to encourage.

He had lived under her father's roof; been esteemed and respected there. He was now her husband's guest, treated with every distinction, received and trusted as a *gentleman*, as a man of principle and

honour. Was it likely, was it possible even that he could meditate wrong under circumstances such as these? Could he take each day in friendly greeting the hand of him he wished to injure? Could he talk and smile as gaily as any of the others, if such a dark secret were in his heart? Could he remain a single hour amongst persons he was basely deceiving, and fawn upon those he only waited an opportunity to sting?

Theresa's face glowed with honest indignation while she was speaking; but, as soon as she paused, the bright colour faded, tears rushed impetuously to her eyes, and she bent her head meekly, as if waiting for another storm to burst upon it.

"You talk like a foolish child," said the wise Janet, contemptuously; "and if this ignorance is not a mere assumption, as many would be inclined to suspect, I shall deem it my duty to enlighten you on various points connected with your very absurd observations. Let it suffice, for

the moment, to inform you, that young men—particularly those in fashionable society—have a code of morality quite peculiar to themselves, and very different from anything you appear to have a notion of. Arthur Cressingham would think it no dishonour to win your affections; and though the whole world would trample upon *you*, there would not be found one in a hundred to censure *him*."

"And I should deserve to be trampled upon by the whole world," said Theresa, with compressed energy and bitterness; adding in touchingly mournful accents, "I am sure Lawrence knows my heart."

It was by no means Janet's intention that her son should be made acquainted with this little scene. She was quite aware that he had implicit confidence in his wife, and that he would deeply resent the accusations that had been levelled against her. Whether these were really merited or otherwise, Lady Singleton did not very greatly care. She liked to coin-

cide with Mrs. Ashton's opinions, and she liked also the temporary dignity with which the office of censor to her youthful daughter-in-law invested her. But for anything beyond this, she was by no means prepared, and Theresa's last remark sufficed to warn her ladyship that she was already getting upon dangerous ground.

"Oh, as for your heart," she replied with sarcastic peevishness, "that is not the question at all. Of course, I take it for granted that you love your husband, and would not wilfully do him an injury; but when young women have such a craving after admiration, they are very apt to forget everything that is not immediately connected with the gratification of this unworthy passion. I hope, however, my dear, that I have spoken in time to arrest your downward course, and that I may never more have occasion to allude to the obnoxious subject. You can go now, as the second bell will ring in about ten minutes, and I shall scarcely have time

to dress. Remember, it is my particular desire that you do not trouble Lawrence with—with—in short, that you mention to him nothing of this conversation."

The warning was not needed. The true wife would have suffered tortures rather than reveal to her husband the cruel slander—for it was a slander, and nothing less—that his mother had repeated concerning her. Theresa knew that it had originated in Mrs. Ashton; but she had sufficient acuteness to perceive that Lady Singleton was little better than a puppet in the hands of her clever, ambitious, and unscrupulous friend; and that, so long as this lady remained an inmate of the family, Lady Singleton would use Mrs. Ashton's eyes, Mrs. Ashton's ears, and Mrs. Ashton's judgment, instead of her own.

Theresa had received a wound—not a wound that pains the heart for a few days or weeks, and then heals and is forgotten—but a wound that was mortal, as far as its own incurability was concerned.

A pure woman—a pure wife especially—*never* can forget an accusation of lightness or unfaithfulness. It falls with a peculiarly chilling weight upon the mind; it embitters the feelings, to a certain extent, against the whole human race; it induces suspicion and mistrust, where all was perfect faith and confidence before; it destroys simplicity and ingenuousness of conduct, and teaches either stiff-necked prudery, or unworthy deceit.

Theresa had an instinctive perception that she should be led into one of these errors, as a consequence of the malicious espionage set upon her actions, and the predetermination of her enemies to impute evil to all she did.

There was but a single resource; and this the young, right-thinking wife resolved to adopt. She opened her heart to no one—not even to Caroline; but she told Lawrence that her happiness depended on his allowing her to be his constant companion—on his employing her daily and

hourly in his study, and letting Lady Singleton understand that this arrangement was to be a permanent one.

Lawrence saw that his little wife was in earnest. He had some vague impressions relative to the insecurity of female friendships; and thought it probable that poor Tessie did not get on well with the ladies of the family. He asked her two or three questions, but she only began to cry; and so the matter was allowed to drop, and Theresa withdrew from the gay assemblage of her mother-in-law's guests, and became the companion and occasional assistant of the lonely and abstracted student.

Lady Singleton was secretly annoyed at this unlooked-for result of her folly and cruelty. She had not the same amount of personal vanity as was possessed by the still handsome Lilla Ashton, and Janet liked well enough to be complimented on the beauty and grace of her beautiful daughter-in-law. Besides this, she was annoyed by the continual questions of her

visitors regarding the sudden desertion from their ranks of one so fitted to shine—so full of life and gaiety as Theresa.

"Pray, ask her yourselves this evening, good people," the persecuted mother-in-law had repeated a dozen times; but when the evening came, Theresa was always found close to her husband, and looking so dull and out of spirits, that her friends and admirers had no chance of having their curiosity relieved.

There was one amongst them who made bolder attempts than any of the rest, and appeared, indeed, resolved that nothing should daunt him. But, although he contrived, at last, to speak to Mrs. Lawrence, it was presumed that she had said nothing very pleasing in return; as, in answer to the numerous enquiries that assailed him after the brief *tête-à-tête*, he declared he could make out nothing, but that he believed there was something wrong.

And a very few days succeeding this, the Honorable Arthur Cressingham took his departure.

During the remainder of the time that the family continued at Burnham Park, affairs went on pretty smoothly. Lawrence was preparing his first work for publication, and Theresa now assisted him in earnest. She was very proud of her occupation—very happy in being always at her husband's side; but, in spite of this, her cheek grew paler and paler, and everybody, except Lawrence, saw that she was far from well.

"Why don't you have a copyist, my good fellow?" said Sir James Singleton one day to his son. "That everlasting scribbling is destroying your wife's beauty, and doing no good to health, I'm afraid."

"Theresa does not complain, Sir," replied Lawrence, glancing at his wife, who certainly, at that moment, while general attention was directed towards her, looked rosy enough to justify his unconcern; "and as for a copyist, I could never endure such an individual about me. Neither could anybody, except my patient little scribe

here, decypher my blotted and untidy manuscripts. Theresa will tell me when she wearies of the tasks I impose upon her, and then I must manage to do all myself."

"Oh! but I shall never weary of them, dear Lawrence," said Theresa, with affectionate earnestness. And this was true, as far as the devoted mind was concerned; but for the frail body—who might presume to say?

Sir James, seconded warmly by Caroline Ashton, made one or two more attempts to convince his son that Theresa was overtaxing her strength, and that the study was the worst place in the world for her. Lawrence, however, was like the deaf adder—he would not listen, he would not be warned. He felt convinced Theresa must be the best judge of her own health—and Theresa persisted in declaring that she was perfectly well.

Just now, too, his book was certainly the all-engrossing object. He had toiled at it so zealously—he had bent every

power of his mind to this one important task—he had sacrificed rest, and sleep, and healthful recreations, for so many patient months; and now, after all this, he felt dissatisfied with the result—he was doubtful concerning the success of his really arduous labours.

Happily, no such mental disquietudes agitated his unwearying fellow-worker. How large, how boundless, how illimitable, is our confidence in those we love! What a rock of strength they stand upon! How proudly they—the dear ones—tower above all the world! How impossible, it seems to us, that anything they undertake should fail to draw down the whole earth's applause!

Theresa did not think, or hope, or expect that Lawrence's book would succeed! *She knew it.* Knew it so well, so surely, that already her prophetic soul had seen the laurel bound upon his brow; and her woman's heart was doing homage to the future enlightener of mankind—to her own beloved and worshipped husband.

In the midst of their labours and enthusiasm, the country campaign came to an end; and as nothing could induce Lawrence to move from Burnham Park, the young couple were left in undisputed possession of the deserted mansion; while the remainder of the family, including Caroline—who was soon to proceed to Elderton—hastened, with all the other denizens of fashion and gaiety, to London.

CHAPTER XIII.

"And now they are all gone, dear Lawrence, and we are quite alone; and the sun is shining, the birds are singing, the flowers—my sweet, beautiful flowers, that remind me so of Elderton and home—are opening on every side, and you will, just for this once, please your little wife and come out with me for a walk or ride. I know you will—you are smiling, dear, dear Lawrence. Let me put aside these weary books, for I see, I am sure you will come."

And so Lawrence did. How could he refuse that loving, pleading voice?—how could he turn from those fond and earnest eyes? And was it not a pleasure, a delight to him, to stroll under the blue skies, to inhale the fragrant air, to drink in all the sweet melodious harmonies of nature by

the side of his own pretty, darling Tessie, —his little fond and faithful wife?

Yes, Lawrence was far from insensible to the charms of such a pastime. He knew —none better than himself—that the whole world's treasury contained nothing better, sweeter, more congenial to his inmost heart than this. He knew that the fullest realization of his wildest dreams of fame would bring him less happiness than he experienced now in walking beside Theresa,—in feeling the loving clasp of her soft, warm hand,—in meeting the tender glances of her blue and liquid eyes,—in listening to her artless but eager expressions of enjoyment in being quite alone with him once more.

Oh, yes, he knew it all. Lawrence was not a fool, nor a stoic, nor a man without a heart. He was only a dreamer of dreams —a moral somnambulist,—one who saw less and yet more than those around him,—one who would be in constant danger of leaving the substance to pursue the shadow,

awaking to his error when atonement was beyond his power.

They were both of them so happy now, —so much in love with each other still,— so contented to be away from all the world, —and pleased as children to have emancipated themselves, even for a single day, from the dark, dull study, and to be wandering under the pure, unclouded skies.

Theresa was like a bird set free. She could speak, think, act, and look, without fear or apprehension of any kind. She could laugh, or sing, or talk what nonsense she pleased, and there was none to smile contemptuously, or to say—"Dear me, Mrs. Lawrence!" or, "Pray remember that you are at Burnham Park."

The husband could not fail to remark the change; and though he had only a vague perception of the feelings in which it originated, he resolved by and bye to think seriously of having a home to themselves, where his dear little wife would be undisputed mistress, and where they could

create a domestic paradise, according to their own mutual fancy and inclination.

But at present any such important step would materially interfere with the pursuits to which he was devoted. Besides, his father and mother both earnestly desired, that in case of an heir being granted them, it should be born at Burnham Park, and it was now the general opinion that Theresa's declining health might have reference to this event. And they were yet so young, with, probably, so many years before them, that there was ample time to think of changing their plans.

So argued Lawrence; and with this unauthorized presumption of 'ample time'—(what did he know of the decrees of Omnipotence?)—the subject was dismissed, till a more convenient season, from his thoughts.

That evening, as Theresa sat, with her husband, watching the early shadows creeping slowly over the terrace on which their window looked, she lifted her sweet eyes suddenly to his pensive face, and said—

"Lawrence, it is long since I have seen my mother."

"It is, my Tessie," he replied, kindly but absently, for his mind just then had wandered into other regions: "but she is quite well. You always have good accounts from home."

"Oh, yes!" said Theresa, meekly. But a sigh followed which would have rendered this "oh, yes," perfectly intelligible to any less-abstracted husband than Lawrence.

They sat silently together till the untended fire was quite extinct, and the moon rose above the dark trees in the garden beneath, and not a sound was audible except the gentle moaning of the evening wind and their own hearts quiet beating. Then Lawrence took up his wife's cold hands, and while he chafed them tenderly in his warmer ones, he stooped to gaze into the pale, patient face, and asked what his little Tessie was thinking of?

"Of my mother," said Theresa, softly

and sadly. "I cannot help it sometimes, dear Lawrence. You are not angry with me, are you?"

"Oh! Theresa, my darling, my own good little wife!" he exclaimed, with sudden energy, and drawing her into his arms—"it is I that should ask that question of you. What a selfish, thoughtless, inconsiderate husband I have been. You would like to see your mother, dearest—to have her with you here. Of course you would, and shall, before another week is passed. Your father, too—we must have them both: it will be a great pleasure for me, Tessie; indeed it will. Nay, my foolish, little girl, do not sob in that wild way, as if I had done great things for you. I ought to do more—much more—to promote your happiness; and so I would, if there was not this restless demon in my heart, which lures me constantly from all life's best, and gentlest, and sweetest feelings. Ah! Theresa, dearly, fondly, as I love you, I fear, even now, as I feared when first your soft eyes began to droop

before the gaze of mine, that, for you, it was an evil destiny which brought us together."

"Come what may hereafter, I shall ever feel that it was a most blessed one," said Theresa, with solemn earnestness. And then, divided between smiles and tears, and those fond caresses which stir the inmost hearts of those who receive them, she told her husband how good he was, how precious to her, how immeasurably superior to all she had ever hoped to find, and a thousand other sweetly foolish things that young wives learn instinctively to utter, and sometimes, alas! forget almost as easily to feel.

"Let us have candles now," at length said Lawrence, "and this evening I will devote entirely to you. We will have music—your sweet voice, Tessie—and talking, and what you will; but no books, no writing, no labour of any kind. My little wife shall be made happy for once; her holiday shall be perfect and complete."

And so it was—a day that Theresa long looked back upon yearningly—a day that she kept enfolded in her heart amongst its sweetest and most sacred relics—a day in which there had been few shadows on the light, and of which she could truly say, without having recourse to that flattering mist so often wrapt around the past,—

"It was, indeed, a happy one."

CHAPTER XIV.

The bright, the joyous, the thrice welcome spring had come again, and with it "the slow sweet hours, that bring us all things good," had brought Caroline Ashton's marriage day.

She had spent two tranquil, happy months with Mrs. Forrest, while Philip was engaged in London on business connected with his new appointment, and then, at Mrs. Berrington's earnest entreaty, she had removed to the rectory, from whence Philip was to take her to their London home.

Mrs. Ashton had excused herself from coming to the wedding on the plea of delicate health, and Lady Singleton had got out of asking Caroline to be married from her house on the equally genuine plea of not having a day she could call her own.

But Caroline forgave them, fully and freely, and rejoiced that the latter favour, at least, had not been conferred on her. She could now have everything done according to her peculiar notions, as Philip had become gentle and tractable as a lamb, and yielded implicit obedience to all the directions of his future wife.

Mrs. Forrest had grown very nervous as the day approached. She had evidently not even yet made up her mind as to the prudence and wisdom of this unaccountable love match. She was always looking anxiously, often tearfully, at Caroline, and seeming as if she would fain give utterance to some uneasy thoughts, but was uncertain what effect they might produce.

So it went on until the evening before the wedding, and then, while Caroline and Mrs. Berrington were sitting together, and chatting about Theresa—with whom the latter had recently spent a fortnight—Mrs. Forrest was suddenly announced.

"I have come, my love," she said, ad-

dressing Miss Ashton, "to see whether my arguments will be more effectual than Philip's, in prevailing on you to take a walk. It is not often that I venture on such friskiness myself; but to-night I would gladly have a little stroll with you, if it is only in our own quiet lane."

Caroline felt perfectly convinced that there was an object in this little stroll; but although she had a pretty clear idea of what her future aunt was going to talk about, and would have been as well pleased to have escaped the *téte-à-téte*, she had too much esteem and affection for Mrs. Forrest to refuse such an apparently simple and natural request.

In a few minutes they were walking side by side in the green lane so often alluded to, and Caroline, not feeling inclined for light or trifling conversation, was waiting somewhat anxiously for Mrs. Forrest to open her heart.

At length the gentle widow spoke thus: "My dearest Caroline, I cannot let you

take the irrevocable step which will bind you to my nephew for life, without once more warning you that you are encountering a fearful risk. I do not allude to Philip's peculiar temper and disposition, though these might alarm a less courageous person than yourself; neither am I thinking now of the probable struggles you will have to undergo, for a few years, to keep up those appearances which your husband's situation will render necessary. I believe I know you too well, Caroline, to fear that any worldly privations would interfere materially with your happiness. But—but—it is difficult and painful for me to express what I mean, my dear. I fear to wound you; and, indeed, it seems almost cruel, at this eleventh hour, to disturb your peace. I would not do so, Caroline, if my conscience would let me rest; but it will not. It has tormented me unceasingly of late—ever since my nephew came to me from Burnham Park; for I discovered then, Caroline, with infinite

sorrow and alarm, that Theresa had still too much room in his heart, and—and—"

It was really pitiable to witness the distress of this kind-hearted and affectionate woman,—to see the struggle that was going on between her conscience and her natural tenderness of feeling. Caroline, though not unmoved, interrupted her at this point:—

"My best and kindest friend," she said, earnestly, "let me spare you the pain I am quite sure you are experiencing. I believe I know all, and more than you can tell me, on the subject of Philip's heart, unless——" she paused, and seemed much agitated for a few minutes—"unless you have any commission from him to speak to me; unless you *know* that he wishes our engagement to be annulled."

"So far from this," Mrs. Forrest hastened to reply, "that I am sure he would never pardon my present interference. He has made up his mind that you shall be his wife. He has the greatest possible

esteem and regard for you. He thinks more highly of you than of anybody in the world. But——"

Again Caroline interrupted her companion—

"But, you would say, he does not *love* me. Mrs. Forrest, I have known this from the beginning. Philip has never attempted to deceive me."

The widow was fairly puzzled now. She mused for a short time, and then said—

"I fear, Caroline, you do not estimate the difficulties of your future position. At present you may endure the thought that another is, in spite of all his efforts, nearer Philip's heart than yourself; but, as a wife, it will, I assure you, be very different. Your hope and object is, of course, to win your husband's entire affections; and far be it from me to assert that you will not succeed. But, my dear girl, have you ever reflected that failure is, at least, possible; and have you ever looked steadily upon your own condition in such a case?"

"Dear Mrs. Forrest, hear me for a moment. My first object, if I understand myself at all, is to render Philip happy. Until he asked me to be his wife, it had not entered into my wildest imaginings to conceive that I possessed any power of doing so; but, from the instant this destiny was proposed to me, I felt that my mission had been announced. We have all some appointed work on earth. This is mine. I have explained to you before that I could never diffuse my sympathies—that they will always unite themselves in one focus; and now that this has been provided for me, I have only to submit, and to believe that the end will atone for the beginning."

It may be thought that such a candid statement as the above, given, too, with that cheerful composure for which Miss Ashton was distinguished, ought to have satisfied every fear and scruple of the tender-hearted Mrs. Forrest. But it did not. She continued silent and thoughtful for

several minutes after Caroline had spoken, and the latter asked her, at length, whether she had still anything on her mind.

"Yes," was the grave answer, "I am far from satisfied with your explanation. I cannot believe that the simple feeling of its being your duty, or, as you term it, your mission to render Philip happy, will suffice to insure your *own* happiness in a married life. I am altogether puzzled at your course of action. I am uneasy about you, Caroline. You seem to be guided by a superstitious feeling of destiny; whereas in cases of this sort the heart should certainly be the first guide. If there is a key to your conduct, which will render it more satisfactorily intelligible, do not conceal it from me, my dear; for my heart forebodes evil of this marriage, which appears to be neither for love nor interest."

"Mrs. Forrest," said Caroline, with deep feeling, "you shall have my secret; your fears shall be set at rest. I love

Philip—have loved him from the first. As his wife I *may* be unhappy, but apart from him I could never know enjoyment. It will be no sacrifice to devote my life to him. I rejoice in the destiny that has been appointed for me. I glory in my mission."

Mrs. Forrest was startled—filled with wonder and amazement; but she had not another word to urge. Whatever fears she might still cherish, they must rankle in her own breast; she had no right to give them utterance. She must leave Caroline for the future, to the promptings of that earnest faith and love which had hitherto so amply sufficed for her support.

"God bless you, my dear, dear girl," she said, with unusual tenderness and solemnity at parting. "May to-morrow be, indeed, the dawn of a destiny as happy as you deserve."

* * * * *

Caroline had slept little on her marriage eve; and, before the rest of the family were stirring, she got up and went down into

the rectory garden to enjoy the pure and refreshing air of a bright spring morning. It was—not accidently, but by Caroline's own arrangement — the anniversary of Theresa's wedding—the anniversary, too, of the day on which Philip had first asked her to be his wife.

She was walking slowly through the labyrinthine paths, thinking of these and many other things, revolving in her mind the mysterious chain of circumstances which had at length brought her to this important point of destiny, when suddenly footsteps sounded on the gravel path behind her, and turning round she saw Philip rapidly approaching.

"See how well I know you, Carry," he said, drawing her arm quietly within his own." I felt certain you would be walking here this morning. I have been to order you a bouquet."

"Thank you, dear Philip. You never forget anything. It is very early yet—is it not?"

It wants some three hours of the time that will seal our fate—that will convert you into Mrs. Philip Maranham. The flowers smell sweetly this morning, Carry; the skies are very fair. Think you that ten years hence nature will appear to us so beautiful as it does at present?"

"Why should it not? The external world only changes into new varieties of loveliness, and those who have appreciated it once must appreciate it for ever."

"I don't know. I am inclined to think, that when the heart grows old—and, with some of us, this occurs long ere youth is past—the eyes wax dim to all the glories of earth. Have you never, in times of sadness and despondency, seen the blue skies, and the green fields, and the thousand tinted flowers converted into a mass of grey, unmeaning objects, that utter no word to the sinking heart,—that stand like a company of mute spectres before you?"

"Yes, we have all such moments and such hours as these; but they should be

but the sand-banks in the river,—the temporary obstructions to that pure stream of thankful enjoyment which earth's glories were intended to inspire. I cannot fancy any heart, in which virtue is still alive, ceasing to love and delight in external nature."

"You have been well educated, Carry. That Fairfield House, Kensington, must be a capital school. I wish I had chanced to hit upon such an one."

Caroline smiled, and said she wished so too. Philip's sombre thoughts were scarcely in place this morning.

"Here, Carry, have a heartsease," he said, suddenly, kneeling to pluck one as they passed a flower bed. "I give it you in anticipation — against the day when you will sorely need it, and when, perchance, I shall forget to proffer you such a gift."

"You have had ill-boding dreams, I fear," replied Caroline, as she accepted the flower, and looked somewhat anxiously in her lover's face.

"Not a bit," he said quickly, "I have had no dreams at all. But you look pale, Carry. Go into the house and get some tea, and I will return to the cottage to comfort our dear, nervous, loving aunt, who went to bed in the dismals last night."

Theresa's wedding had been quiet, but Caroline's was quieter still. She had no bridesmaids, no young companions at all. Dr. Berrington acted the part of father, and the same clergyman who, a year before, had united Theresa Berrington to Lawrence Singleton, now tied the indissoluble knot between Caroline Ashton and Philip Maranham. Both bride and bridegroom behaved with remarkable composure, and afforded no grounds for remarks or speculations of any kind.

There was a quiet, unpretending little breakfast, at the rectory, and there were tears in abundance, shed by Mrs. Berrington and Mrs. Forrest over the esteemed and amiable bride. And then there was a plain chariot to take them the first stage of

their northward journey, and blessings and farewells, mingled with some voiceless prayers—love's last, best offering!

So all was ended. And another dream —a dream of young and hoping hearts— had, in one little hour, become reality.

CHAPTER XV.

THE scene and the season were changed. It was now the middle of summer, and the place to which I am about to introduce you is Caroline Maranham's London home.

Part—only part—of a small but pleasantly situated house, looking on the park, and within a short walk of Mrs. Darlington's.

It was about six o'clock of a burning July evening. Caroline was sitting alone by the open window of her plainly but very tastefully furnished drawing-room. She was working diligently — mending stockings, indeed, (though this avowal may destroy her claims to heroineship)— and the expression of her countenance was scarcely, a mere suspicion, less cheerful and serene, than it had been in former days.

As much as possible out of the glare of the hot sun, stood a table laid for dinner; and it was evident, from Caroline's frequent glances of observation down the long street, that she was in momentary expectation of her husband's arrival.

Suddenly, while her head was bent over her work, there came a loud double knock at the street door,—quick, peremptory, impatient,—just in Philip's usual style. Caroline's cheek flushed a little, and her heart began to beat—a wife of three months may be excused these indications of emotion—but she did not lay aside her stockings, or move from the seat by the window. Only—as the door was thrown open—she raised her face with a pleasant, quiet smile, which changed scarcely anything of its expression when Mrs. Darlington, instead of Philip, answered it.

The widow was looking as bright, as cheerful, and as friendly as ever. She prevented Caroline from rising by running up to her and grasping both her hands

with affectionate cordiality. "My dear, Mrs. Maranham, pray don't move—its not weather for moving if one can avoid it, I can tell you. I assure you, I'm nearly burnt to a cinder, just coming from my house to yours. And now appreciate my friendship: I only returned from Elderton this morning, and here I am."

Caroline expressed her gratitude, and Mrs. Darlington, untying her bonnet and sitting down, continued,—

"I am charged with all sorts of messages from that excellent and delightful aunt of yours. She worries herself to death about you and your husband. By the bye, I hope Mr. Maranham is quite well. I assure you, my love, that Mrs. Forrest surrounds you with every description of imaginary danger. I have promised to send her a full, true, and particular account of your health, spirits, occupations, and so forth. Turn your face to the light, my dear. Ah, I cannot say that you are looking any great things—

but perhaps the warm weather does'nt agree with you."

"I feel quite well," said Caroline smiling: "but you know my looks never do me justice. I cannot claim even a distant cousinship with the Hebe tribe."

"Oh, you havn't much to complain of. But tell me how you are getting on—how you amuse yourself, and manage to kill time, this melting weather. I must really be very minute in my inquiries before I venture to write to Elderton."

"Stay and dine with us this evening, and then you can make your own observations," said Caroline. "I expect Philip every moment, and he will be so glad of a little society."

"Oh, fie, Mrs. Maranham! I cannot believe that he has the bad taste to be otherwise than satisfied with the companionship of his charming wife. I will stay till he comes, that I may repeat your treason to him; though, as for dinner, mine is a mid-day meal, and I am much more inclined for a cup of tea."

"Which you will find at our table," replied Mrs. Maranham, pointing to some cups and saucers in the back ground. "As Philip gets home so late, we generally unite the two; and thus one trouble does for all."

"Oh, how particularly nice! What a comfortable, happy couple you must be. I can picture you exactly, sitting opposite to each other at that cosy-looking table, and making love with your eyes, while your hands and mouths are less sentimentally engaged."

"Can you?" said Caroline, in her quiet, unsuggestive sort of way.

"Yes, of course I can, with the same remarkable gift of penetration that shows me my poor little Tessie weeping her bright eyes dim over the fierce literary mania of her solemn husband. I suppose you know that his book is published?"

"No. It is many weeks since I have heard from Theresa. I was going to ask you about them."

Before Isabel could reply, another knock reverberated through the house, and immediately after, Philip threw open the door, and strode, with his firm, energetic step, into the room.

Mrs. Darlington having retired into the shade he did not at first discover her; and walking up to his wife he stooped to kiss her forehead, and then uttered some impatient ejaculations concerning the heat, the dust, and the distance he had to come from his office.

"Then behold something to make you forget your troubles," said Caroline cheerfully, directing her husband's attention to their lively guest, who now advanced from her corner, and warmly greeted the master of the house.

Philip, of course, declared that the very sight of Mrs. Darlington was sufficient to drive away a legion of annoyances; but he really did appear glad to see her, and after rectifying, in some degree, his dusty toilette, he took his seat at the table, and for a

short time did nothing to dispel that pleasing vision which the widow had so recently created for him and Caroline.

The latter, however,—perhaps intentionally, and by way of experiment,—soon recurred to the subject which Philip's entrance had interrupted; and Mrs. Darlington told them that Lawrence's book was likely to have a great success, and that Theresa spoke of him, in her letters home, as being more devoted to study than ever.

"What a fool that man is," said Philip bitterly, and with his usual disregard of polite terms. "He is no more capable of appreciating the wealth of love bestowed on him than a blind man is capable of appreciating the beauties of the earth and skies."

"Of course he is not," put in Isabel. "I always looked upon that marriage as a cruel sacrifice."

"And I must differ from you both," said Caroline, firmly; "for I am convinced that Lawrence not only estimates but

warmly returns his wife's devotion. We must make some allowances for a person who feels in himself powers of mind and genius that have never yet been perfectly developed, and by the exercise of which he hopes, with a very pardonable enthusiasm, to benefit his fellow men."

"What a pity he did not marry you," exclaimed Philip, half laughingly, and yet with a sufficient spice of ill humour to make Mrs. Darlington look up suddenly, and raise her arched eyebrows in a peculiarly expressive manner. "You would have been able to understand and appreciate each other," he continued, disregarding the widow's astonishment; "and as two negatives are said to make an affirmative, so, in like manner, the union of two icy natures might possibly make a warm one."

Caroline looked grieved for a moment at this unprovoked attack; but she neither sighed nor assumed any other airs of an injured wife. On the contrary, it appeared

to be her anxious wish to give the whole affair an unimportant aspect in the eyes of their watchful guest; and after returning some good-humoured reply to her husband, she adroitly changed the conversation, and managed so that Isabel became the principal talker during the remainder of the time they sat at table.

Philip, indeed, no longer exerted himself to be agreeable. He had evidently hit upon a gloomy train of thought; and while his two companions chatted together on a hundred different subjects, he continued silent, moody, and, apparently, entirely inattentive to what was passing around him.

Only once he turned abruptly to his wife, and said—"Have the dogs been out to-day, Carry?"

And the wife replied that she had taken them for a run herself, soon after Philip left home in the morning.

"Poor Carry!" he then added, stretching out his hand to her; "you have enough to bear between the dogs and their master."

When Mrs. Darlington was going away, Caroline accompanied her into the bedroom, where her shawl and bonnet had been deposited; and while she assisted her friend to put them on, the latter said, in a more serious tone than was usual with her—

"You invited me to make my observations, my dear, and I have made them. Do you think it would be desirable to give Mrs. Forrest the full benefit of what I have discovered?"

"It would necessarily be a very meagre gift," replied Caroline, "even allowing you that almost supernatural penetration which you claim as a special endowment."

"And which is no idle boast, I assure you, my love. However, do not be alarmed. I shall send no very terrible report of your domestic manners and habits to Elderton. That husband of yours has got a heart which, if rightly managed, should make his wife a happy woman. Take the advice of a person whose experience is somewhat

larger than your own, Caroline. You love your husband. Do not shrink from showing him that you do so. If your nature is reserved and undemonstrative, conquer this nature. Let him look into the very depths of your soul, and depend upon it, the sight of himself enthroned there in regal state, will go far towards reconciling him to the petty annoyances of life, as well as sweetening those bitter feelings whose venom appears to be directed chiefly against coldness and insensibility of heart."

"You have not seen Philip to advantage to-night," said Caroline; "but come to us oftener, and I am quite sure you will learn to estimate him as he deserves."

* * * * *

A London life, accompanied, too, by habits of dull, plodding, industry, is certainly very trying to those who have been brought up in the country and unaccustomed to any sort of restraint.

Mrs. Maranham was fully aware of all

this—none better than herself could understand that yearning, that restless pining of the heart for the green coolness of woods and fields, which so often afflicts the dwellers in close and crowded cities. It was, therefore, not difficult for her to judge Philip leniently, when, day by day, he execrated the dull office and the hot streets, and the want of all interest and excitement in his present existence.

But, unfortunately, her lenient judgment, her patient forbearance, her affectionate sympathy, did nothing towards removing the evil. Philip persisted in declaring that her constitutional coldness and apathy alone prevented her from getting out of temper and out of spirits as he did. Of course, he rejoiced that it was so; he should be very sorry to see her feel things keenly: it was a great source of consolation to him to reflect that, while he was fretting and fuming, like a caged bear, in that dark, stifling office, his wife was sitting at home, with a serene smile upon

her face, caring for nothing but the completion of a bit of embroidery or an elaborate darn in her stocking.

"But then," he generally finished by saying, "you are a young lady from Fairfield House, and I am only the young lady's husband."

Sometimes Caroline would succeed in laughing him out of these moods, and then, for a short time, all would be harmony and sunshine; but there were other occasions on which she found it impossible to make the slightest impression, and when he would sit during a whole evening without opening his lips either for good or bad.

It happened, once or twice, that he brought home a friend to dinner; but the task of entertaining him was left almost entirely to the wife—Philip himself taking the opportunity of having up his dogs, or of going quietly to sleep in his easy-chair.

Mrs. Darlington was their most frequent visitor, and she never failed, when alone

with Caroline, to repeat the advice she had given her the first evening.

"It provokes me, my dear," she often said, "to see you hide your real feelings as you do. When Philip comes home at night, you rarely move from your seat to welcome him; and yet I can detect the agitation and the pleasure you are actually experiencing. Now, if I were in your place, I should jump up, throw my arms round his neck, call him a darling, and do all sorts of extravagant things. How is any husband to know that his wife loves him, if she is too proud to tell him so."

"Oh, it is scarcely pride," Caroline would answer eagerly. "Philip ought to be convinced of my affection, without having it constantly dinned into his ears. I am sure he has quite as much of it as he desires."

"No such thing," her friend would again retort. "My eyes were not given me to be looked at only."

Caroline, however, made no alteration in

her conduct, neither did she think it necessary to tell Mrs. Darlington that the consciousness of not possessing her husband's whole heart restrained her from yielding openly to the pleasure and satisfaction his presence always afforded her. Mrs. Forrest's forebodings had been in some degree realized; for, as Caroline's love for Philip deepened, the idea that he still thought regretfully of Theresa haunted her like a dark spectre, and rendered those lonely hours she spent at home far less cheerful and serene than Philip pictured them. The wish to render him happy—to cure the restlessness of his nature—was now, as ever, the great end to which she devoted herself. But the difficulties which had appeared molehills in the distance became mountains on a near approach, and Caroline was forced to acknowledge that a mightier power than her own would be needed to still the unquiet waters, and to wave the wand of peace over an unsatisfied human heart.

Henceforth she would strive to trample on the vain presumption which had led her to expect victory by her unaided personal exertions, and ask, in deep humility, the guidance of unerring Wisdom.

This was a great and important step on her part; but there was yet much to endure—much to suffer patiently. Philip appeared quite unable to reconcile himself to his position, and equally incapable of concealing his discontent from his wife. To use his own words, "the blue skies, and the green fields, and the thousand-tinted flowers" were, for him, nearly always converted into a mass of grey, unmeaning objects, because life itself was, at present, devoid of any rational aim, and the soul remained dead to the real purpose of its creation.

If Caroline's judgment had not been blinded by that one fixed idea concerning Theresa, she might certainly have done much more good than she did. About this time she was taken ill; and the tenderness

and anxiety then displayed by Philip, and which roused him completely from all his imaginary troubles, ought to have proved to her that she was not so far from his heart as her fears led her to believe, and that with a little more courage she might withdraw him from himself, and open to him sources of interest that would materially brighten the present cheerless aspect of his disappointed life.

But Caroline had not learnt her whole lesson yet; so as her health amended she resumed her original habits of reserve and apparent coldness, while Philip took up his suspended lamentations, and found "weariness" inscribed on every object in creation.

To the wife, the husband became again the secret worshipper of another; to the husband, the wife became once more the young lady from Fairfield House. And the line of separation grew wider and wider between them.

Philip pursued his occupation because

nothing better presented itself, and he could not afford to be idle; but his disgust to a London life increased day by day, and Caroline saw, with sorrow and anguish of heart, that hitherto her labour of love had failed—that Philip was not happy!

And so the bright summer passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

The month of September was nearly over when, one morning, the following letter was delivered to Caroline, and by her read aloud at the breakfast table:—

"Burnham Park,
"Sept. 19th, 18—.

"My dear Caroline,

"In returning from the sea-side, we stayed too short a time in London to be able to pay you a visit, which was, of course, very annoying, and a great source of regret, both to Janet and myself. Perhaps, however, it was as well that the Singletons did not call, as, living in apartments, you might not have had everything quite so nice as you could wish on such

an occasion. To tell you the honest truth, my dear, I received a considerable shock the other day, when, on coming up to town with Janet for a few hours (just to look in at the bazaars and so forth), as we were driving slowly down Regent-street, I saw you—*quite alone, too*—descending from an omnibus! Lady Singleton very kindly proposed stopping the carriage and taking you up; but before I could decide on what was best to be done, you were out of sight, and the crowds were so great that we could not tell which way you had gone. I really wonder that Mr. Maranham should suffer you to wander about the streets so entirely unprotected, and I certainly did not expect, in a young lady educated as you have been, that want of refinement which could permit of your travelling with an indiscriminate company of the unwashed, in a common omnibus But this is not exactly to the point of my letter. The fact is, Mrs. Lawrence has disappointed the whole family; the hope

that she was about to become a mother has proved a fallacious one, which I must say is very hard upon Sir James, and Lady Singleton, who so generously overlooked the low connection of their son in the natural expectation that a boy, to inherit the title and property after Lawrence, would be granted to them. Theresa is, or fancies herself, in bad health, and Sir James thinks she would like to have you here for a short time to cheer her, as Lawrence is busier than ever, and scarcely allows himself time to eat, drink, or sleep. Of course, if your husband can get a holiday, Lady Singleton will expect to see him too. There is nobody else invited before Christmas, with the exception of Arthur Cressingham; but you need not mind him, as he has no eyes or ears for any one besides Mrs. Lawrence. Write and tell me the day you will arrive, and with compliments to Mr. Maranham,

"I am, my dear Caroline,

"Your attached mother,

"LILLA ASHTON."

Caroline had laughed at the passage concerning her descent from the omnibus, but Philip appeared to think it no laughing matter. He said nothing, however, until the letter was finished, and then, on his wife looking up into his gloomy face, with a half amused, half deprecating expression, he exclaimed—in a particularly decided tone of voice,—

"You must go without me, Carry. I fancy I should find the atmosphere of Burnham Park more oppressive even than that of London."

As a matter of course, Caroline mistook the meaning of this speech, and imagined that it referred to her husband's yet unconquered passion for Theresa; and while her reason approved his determination, her heart ached sorely at the idea that it was a necessary one. She would not, however, appear to understand anything that he did not openly confess, and her reply afforded Philip no clue to the nature of her grieved and wounded feelings, for she only said,—

"I would much rather not go alone. It will be easy to decline the invitation."

"No, no," rejoined the husband warmly: "you must go, Carry. It would be unkind to Theresa, were you to refuse; and it will do *you* a world of good also. You require a change of some sort."

It was quite in vain for Caroline to protest that she should have no enjoyment in the visit—that she required no change,—that she should infinitely prefer remaining at home with her husband. Philip was resolved that she should go; and believing, at length, that he wished to get rid of her, Caroline ceased to argue the point, and, with a sinking heart, wrote to name the day when she would make her appearance at Burnham Park.

From this time Philip made no allusion to the contents of Mrs. Ashton's letter. He was particularly kind and attentive to his wife; and as the time for her leaving him approached, Caroline almost fancied that he seemed sorry at having urged her to go.

But on her proposing to give it up, even now, he declared so loudly against such a plan, that she was again forced into the painful belief that his depression had no connection whatever with herself.

In spite of all this, Caroline was really miserable at the thoughts of parting from her husband; and when the day actually arrived, her spirits gave way entirely, and she burst into a sudden fit of tears at the breakfast table.

Philip, wholly unused to any demonstration of strong feeling in his wife, was quite at a loss to account for her present emotion. He begged her, with the utmost kindness, to tell him what was the matter; and going round to where she sat he kissed her affectionately, and made her flushed cheek rest against his shoulder.

Poor Carry! if she could but have said then "I cannot bear to leave you, Philip; I have no joy—no happiness—apart from you; I love you with my whole heart and soul," how much she might have spared

herself! But Caroline had two great foes to contend with—her own natural reserve, and her belief in Philip's love for another. So she only made a strong effort to dry her tears, and said she was foolish, nervous, had passed a bad night, and was, perhaps, not altogether recovered from her recent illness.

Philip did not go to his office that morning, having arranged to take his wife to the coach, that would convey her to within a few miles of her destination. They neither of them spoke much during their half hour's drive from their own house to the place whence the coach started; but on arriving, and finding it just ready to go, Caroline pressed her husband's hand, and said with earnest feeling—

"You will write to me often, Philip. You will recall me instantly, if my presence can be of the slightest comfort to you—if you find it dull to be alone, if ———"

"We will talk it all over as we go along," replied Philip, interrupting her, and jumping into the coach. You could not suppose I should be such a brute as to let you travel alone, especially after the symptoms of this morning. No, Carry, I do not leave you until you are safe in your friends' carriage."

This little incident affected the wife deeply. Under pretence of being sleepy, she drew down her veil, and wept silently till the moment of parting arrived. Then Philip lifted the screen from before her face, scrutinized it narrowly, and whispering something in her ear—which made Caroline start, and become very red indeed—he wrung her hand, blessed her fervently, and withdrew, as Lady Singleton's carriage appeared in sight.

Caroline Maranhan had certainly as small a proportion of that sensitive personal pride, which is ever on the watch for slights and insults, as any daughter of Eve; but in the present excited state of

her feelings she could not avoid being struck by, and, in some degree resenting, the very different reception she experienced now, from that which had awaited her on the occasion of her first visit to Burnham Park.

The family were now, as then, assembled in the drawing-room, expecting the announcement of dinner. There were, at least, Sir James and Lady Singleton, Mrs. Ashton and Arthur Cresssingham—the two former reading, at separate tables; the two latter chatting very sociably together on the little sofa by the fire.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Maranham! how glad I am to see you!" exclaimed Janet, in an indolent tone of voice, after Caroline had kissed and spoken a few words to her mother. "Do let me look at you, my dear. I hope you had not to wait for the carriage. You are in capital time for dinner. What a pity Mr. Maranham could not come. But Sir James is dying to speak to you. You know you always were such a favourite of his.

And Sir James did speak; and his words were very kind and friendly. He even left his newspaper, and got up to shake hands with his pale and weary-looking guest; but, for all this, Caroline detected a change, even in him, and a feeling of contempt replaced the foolish resentment that, in the first moment of astonishment, had crept into her heart.

She was glad, now, very glad, that Philip had declined coming. He would, without a doubt, have understood it all—have known that her marriage with him, their comparative poverty, and consequent exclusion from fashionable society, had entailed these petty slights upon her; and his proud, independent spirit would, she felt assured, have been wounded to the quick.

After Sir James's greeting, Mrs. Maranham turned again to Lady Singleton, and asked where she should find Theresa? She could not repress the natural wish of making the Singletons comprehend that her

visit was principally to their despised daughter-in-law.

"Oh!" said Janet, "she had just gone, when you came in, to try and persuade Lawrence to take his dinner like a Christian. You have no idea what a savage he has become. Perhaps, if you are not too tired, you will join them in the study, and see what your persuasions will effect."

As Caroline was leaving the room, Sir James followed, and offered her his arm. "Mrs. Maranham will think we are all savages," he said: "but let me, at least, show you the way to my son's den, which it is not at all times safe to enter."

When they were outside the door he abandoned the light tone in which he had previously spoken, and said, with grave seriousness—

"I may not have another opportunity, my dear Mrs. Maranham, of conversing with you alone; and I wished much to tell you that I am uneasy about the health of my son's wife. I saw a great change

in her when we came down to the Park, about a month ago. She has been kept in too much all the summer: young girls require air and exercise. Theresa, indeed, is a mere child; but her devotion to Lawrence makes her very obstinate on the subject of giving up the doubtful privilege of assisting him in his arduous labours. You may remember how unsuccessful we were last year, in trying to convince him of the imprudence he was guilty of in letting her write so much. Now, it is even worse; for, although I believe she works less at present, we can never move her from the study; and Lawrence has grown so irritable of late, that he flies out at any one who ventures to speak about his wife's ill health. I have been very anxious for you to come, as I am sure Lawrence has a great esteem for you; and knowing you to be Theresa's sincere friend, he may possibly listen to your representations. Besides this, you will be able to get her out with you sometimes. I fancy she

doesn't feel any particular pleasure in the society of either Lady Singleton or your mother. But here we are now, so I will leave you to go in alone, only don't forget that dinner will soon be ready."

Caroline's intention had been to knock at the door, and announce her name before she entered; but there was much in what she had just heard that alarmed her, for Theresa's happiness no less than for health; and hearing the murmuring of voices she ventured to open the door quietly and walked in.

An author's room, his own peculiar, unmeddled-with, sacred domain! Reader, did you ever happen to see one?

Caroline had never been so privileged before, and no language can describe the dismay—I had almost said disgust,—she experienced, at witnessing the untidy, disorderly, and, to her idea, essentially uncomfortable aspect of everything around. The heaps of dingy looking books, blotted manuscripts, and torn papers, scattered

indiscriminately on the chairs, tables, and ground, formed a most unpleasing picture to an eye accustomed to the perfection of neatness and order ; and when to this were added a half extinguished fire, an unswept hearth, and a lamp that gave a most dim and dreary light, it will not be wondered that Mrs. Maranham was tempted to make the mental enquiry of how Theresa could exist, much less find her happiness, in such a place—such a den, as Sir James had justly called it.

But as artists often choose to give to the subordinate parts of their pictures a repulsive aspect, to heighten the effect of the real subject of the piece, so in this case, the very wretched appearance of Lawrence Singleton's room invested the living figures in it with a beauty and an interest that they might have lacked but for the unsightly objects that surrounded them.

On one side of a baize covered table, on which the dismal lamp was burning, sat Lawrence, the very type of a man who has

given up all for a cherished pursuit, and who estimates time, health, nay, life itself, as mere agents in the cause he has at heart. There was fire in his deep set eye, there was anxiety on his wrinkled brow, there was a feverish spot upon his sunken cheeks, and the mouth alone gave token, and as it were involuntarily, of a still lingering human feeling.

Yes, the mouth had a faint but unmistakably tender smile upon it, excited by the fond, caressing words of his young and lovely wife, who, standing at the back of his chair, had one arm twined round her husband's neck, and with the disengaged hand was pushing away the long, shaggy hair, that would keep falling over his eyes and forehead.

"Don't take part against me, Tessie," he was saying imploringly, as Caroline opened the door; "I must finish this chapter to-night."

"Don't refuse me dear, dear Lawrence," Theresa had replied in her childish, coax-

ing way, when, hearing the rustling of Caroline's dress, she turned round suddenly, and in another moment was clasped tightly in her friend's arms.

For this once the unsocial student was vanquished, and after Theresa had accompanied Mrs. Maranham upstairs to change her dress for dinner, they both returned and bore their reluctant captive in triumph from his den.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was not till they were seated at dinner, and the bright glare of the numerous wax lights fell full upon Theresa's face, that Caroline could really estimate the change of which Sir James Singleton had spoken to her.

And then she saw plainly—in spite of the contentment that beamed in the wife's aspect at having her beloved Lawrence beside her—that there was a visible decay, a decided wasting of health and strength, a look that would have been of other worlds but for the evident and unquestionable clinging of its possessor to the frail idols—or, rather, to one frail idol—of this.

Caroline had no opportunity that evening of speaking to Lawrence about his wife; for soon after the ladies had retired to the

drawing-room he managed to escape to his study, and Theresa said it would be quite impossible to lure him thence again.

Neither was Theresa herself, from the time the gentlemen came in, much more accessible; for the honorable Arthur challenged her to a game of chess, and managed to make it last till just before they all separated for the night.

Caroline's own spirits were not improved by the persevering and trivial questions with which Lady Singleton assailed her, concerning what she did, said, thought, hoped, and feared, now that she was a married woman. It appeared that her ladyship's memory must be curiously defective, for she asked more than once what it seemed like to keep only one servant, and to live in apartments; and felt sure it must be very funny indeed to travel in omnibuses, and to walk about without a footman behind.

Caroline scarcely condescended to feel indignant at all this; but she was heartily

glad when bed-time came; and, when alone in her room, the idea occurred to her of begging Lawrence to spare his wife for a month or so, and returning with her, the following week, to London.

The next morning Theresa herself proposed taking a walk with Mrs. Maranham; and on this occasion none of the party seemed disposed to interfere with her project, Lady Singleton merely observing—as, Caroline fancied, rather spitefully—that she wished Mrs. Lawrence had thought sooner of paying attention to her health. The husband did not even seem to hear what was going on, and he left the breakfast table before any of the others had finished.

The friends had scarcely got beyond the terrace when Caroline mentioned her plan of taking Theresa to stay a few weeks with her in London. It would at least be a change, she said, and Mrs. Darlington was such a near neighbour, that, perhaps between them, they might be able to amuse

her, and keep up her spirits while she was away from her husband.

In Theresa's reply to this invitation there was a prompt decision that astonished Caroline, who had ever found her little friend the meekest and most pliant creature in the world.

"It is very kind of you to want me," she said, "and I really do appreciate it; but no earthly power shall make me leave my husband, except for one purpose, and that would be to go home—home, Caroline! You see I still feel a stranger here. Ah, and if you knew all, or half, even, that I could tell, you would not wonder."

The latter sentences were spoken with considerable excitement; and Mrs. Maranham, turning to look into her companion's face, saw large tears stealing slowly into the mournful eyes, and a quivering, that told of suppressed indignation, coming to the full and still ruby lips.

"What is it, Theresa? You may safely confide your troubles to me. It is not of your husband you have to complain?"

"Oh, Caroline! but you do not know Lawrence—no living soul knows or understands him but myself. He has never—no, never, from the moment I became his wife, spoken one harsh or unkind word to me. He is, to me at least, all goodness, all affection;—all, and far more, I believe, than any other husband ever was to the best wife in the whole world. I hope, with my latest breath, to testify of his generous devotion, of his unexampled goodness, of his constant, unwearied, and precious love."

"I am glad of this, Theresa," said Caroline, warmly; "for with such a rich fund of happiness, you must surely be almost indifferent to the petty vexations which, I can readily believe, you encounter in your present position."

"Well," replied Theresa, with an odd, forced laugh, "I rather think I am growing indifferent, or, perhaps, reckless, about these petty vexations as you call them; but then, there is a reason for this, which I have told to nobody yet."

"Do you mean to tell it to me?"

"I am not quite sure; you might laugh at it; though, indeed—and her voice sank to a low and touchingly mournful tone—it is a very serious matter. But, Caroline, how sweet and mild the air is this morning! Don't you wish we were together in the dear old bennel, or in the cottage garden, beneath our favourite silver birch? Ah, me! I have certainly got the home sickness upon me. How foolish I am this morning. Let us rest on this sheltered seat for a few minutes, and you shall tell me all about your marriage."

But Caroline was in no mood for talking of herself. She was deeply anxious concerning Theresa, whose strange, excited manner alarmed her, more even than the pale, wasted cheeks, which had roused the apprehensions of Sir James Singleton.

After they had sat silently for a few minutes, and Theresa had stripped every leaf from the branch of a tree that hung near her, Mrs. Maranham recurred to the

subject they had before been discussing, and begged her friend to tell her what new grievances she had lately had to endure.

"Oh, it is nothing," replied Theresa, beginning to laugh again, and this time with decidedly hysterical symptoms. "I have been the veriest simpleton from the beginning to care for what they think or say. I never shall again: I am perfectly reckless now. Who could care for people that make it a bitter and never-ceasing reproach to me that I have not had a child? Yes, Caroline, you may open your eyes and doubt? but, the truth—the absurdly ridiculous truth—remains as it was. Even this morning—but why should I talk about all this now, when I have ceased to care for it one bit; when I am perfectly reckless of everything, save pleasing Lawrence, and seeing my dear, dear home once more."

"But why are you reckless, Theresa? what strange event has occurred to make you indifferent to the treatment you receive from your husband's family?"

Theresa turned round and looked Caroline steadily in the face for several minutes, while her own countenance grew pale as death, and an inward trembling appeared to convulse her whole frame.

"*I am dying*, Caroline."

She said it almost in a whisper, and tears, as she spoke, rushed in torrents to her eyes, and rained down the thin cheeks whose present lifeless hue seemed to confirm the terrible assertion.

Who could look upon such a scene unmoved? Who could witness, calmly, this young creature's pity for herself—her anguish at the anticipation of an early death—her shrinking from the thought of leaving all she loved, and the bright, bright world in which she *had* tasted such perfect happiness?

Caroline was far too much affected, too much subdued, to attempt a refutation of the idea poor Theresa had conceived. She could but weep with her, hold the trembling, sobbing girl in her arms, and promise, at

the latter's passionate entreaty, to disclose her secret to no living being—to Lawrence least of all.

As soon as they both became more calm Theresa proposed returning home; but scarcely had they taken the first few steps in that direction when Arthur Cressingham appeared in sight, and, approaching Mrs. Singleton with animated looks, told her he had Lawrence's authority for entreating her to go for a ride; and that, presuming on this, he had ventured to order her pony and his own horse to be at the door in half an hour.

To Caroline's surprise Theresa made no opposition to this arrangement. She even said she should enjoy a ride above all things; and on reaching home, and meeting her mother-in-law in the hall, she exclaimd, almost with an air of defiance—

"I am just going out with Mr. Cressingham."

"That young woman is certainly beside herself," said Janet to Mrs. Ashton, (in

Caroline's hearing, and alluding to Theresa,) at a later hour of the day. "It is my firm belief she will come to no good end."

Caroline thought of an early death-bed, a closing for ever of the innocent blue eyes, a narrow home in the lone churchyard—

And she turned away to weep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Maranham soon discovered that, with Lawrence, there was very little to be done. He would not—as Sir James had said—hear one word about failing health for Theresa. It is true he did not require her presence in the study—he scarcely ever availed himself of her assistance now; but still he persisted obstinately in allowing her to consult her own inclinations—and these inclinations, except on very rare occasions, led her to remain at his side from morning till night.

Caroline was inclined, at first, to set this down as pure selfishness on Lawrence's part, utterly unworthy of the character she had hitherto attributed to her friend's husband. But resolving, if possible, to shame him out of it, she became

convinced of the error under which she had been labouring,

One morning Lawrence came into the library, in search of a book, when Caroline happened to be there alone, writing to Philip; but interesting as this occupation was, it did not prevent her throwing down the pen and seizing the opportunity of commencing her attack upon the apparently invulnerable student.

"Where is your wife?" she asked, with a severity of enunciation that would have convinced anybody except Lawrence that he had fallen in the speaker's esteem.

"In my room," he replied, quietly. "Do you wish to speak to her?"

"No; but I wish to speak to *you*, Mr. Singleton, to tell you that you are assisting to kill your wife, by indulging her in all her foolish whims. Theresa ought to be made to walk, or ride, or drive, every day. You must see that she is wasting rapidly."

Lawrence turned pale at these last words; but replied, with decision—

"My dear Mrs. Maranham, you fancy this. Theresa constantly assures me she is quite well; and I firmly believe her. We cannot always judge people by their looks. I have no wish in the world to prevent her going out, if she likes it; but she prefers being with me, and I will not make her unhappy. My poor, little wife! it has not, I fear, been all sunshine for her here—though, from her own lips, I have never heard a complaint of any one. I did wrong, very wrong, in not taking her, at once, to a home of her own; but this shall soon be remedied. Before next summer, I hope to leave Burnham Park; and if Tessie likes, in the spring, to go and see her mother, while I am looking out for a house, she shall do so. Heaven knows it is my earnest wish to make her happy. I thank you sincerely, Mrs. Maranham, for the interest you feel in my dear little wife; but do not tell me again she is in bad health; for—although I cannot and will not believe it—the very thought of

decay, as connected with Theresa, is painful beyond description to me."

Caroline saw that it was, and her heart bled for the self-deceiving husband, who might be preparing a death-blow to all his earthly happiness. She had scarcely the courage to say more to him at present, and confined herself to a request that he would, at least, prevail on Theresa to go out daily while she (Mrs. Maranham) remained at the Park.

"I will do what I can," he said: "but you cannot fancy how reluctant she is to leave me. My mother has frightened her some way, I believe; though Theresa will confess nothing."

"It will certainly be a far wiser plan," observed Caroline, "to have a home of your own; and if I might offer an opinion, I should say the sooner this is effected the better."

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly. I shall be free for a few months after this winter, and then I will lose no time in seeing about it.

But pray, my dear friend, don't let the people here infect you with any serious apprehensions concerning Theresa's health. They talk at random, and are full of ridiculous fancies. Only think of its being hinted to me that my wife—my pure, innocent girl, who has never had an evil thought—was flirting with Arthur Cressingham! Mrs. Maranham, I would not, to wear a kingly crown, be of that cast of mind which sees evil in the simplest actions. So far from suspecting Theresa, it is my wish that she should—now, especially, after what has been insinuated about her—allow this young man to talk, walk, or ride with her as much as he likes. I have unlimited confidence in him, notwithstanding that he admired my wife so ardently before her marriage; but even if it were otherwise, and that Arthur Cressingham could prove himself a villian, I should still be perfectly fearless in trusting Theresa with him."

To all this Mrs. Maranham had nothing to reply. She, too, trusted Theresa impli-

citly, and felt that for her there would indeed be little danger, though twenty Arthur Cressinghams were to lay their hearts at her feet.

A few days after the above conversation Lawrence, of his own free will, sought Caroline, and asked her, in a nervous, anxious manner, if she had got over her fears about his wife.

It seemed cruel to answer no — to augment the uneasiness under which he was evidently beginning to suffer; but Mrs. Maranham was too conscientious to hold back the truth, and she replied, promptly—

"I have seen no reason to change my first opinion. I consider that Theresa is decidedly in a declining state. But this *may be* only temporary. I should have great faith in a return to her native air. Philip and myself intend going to Elderton for a few weeks at the commencement of next spring. Let your wife accompany us. We would take every care of her, and bring

her back to you, I hope, nearly as blooming as she was when first you took her thence."

"Ah!" said Lawrence, and then paused abruptly, and sighed in a peculiarly mournful manner, adding, presently,—"Would that I had died before I removed her from a happy home, if with me she has not been happy."

Caroline was about to offer some consolatory remark, when Lawrence, rather impatiently, interrupted her.

"Do not let us speak of this now, Mrs. Maranham. Tessie shall go with you in the spring; but, in the mean time, I would fain do something to give her pleasure. It is the mind, I fear, which is acting injuriously upon the frail body. Do you think she would like to have any of her relations here—that cousin, for instance, with whom she was staying during your first visit to Burnham Park? I remember that she was a lively, affectionate creature, and perhaps her presence might cheer my poor little wife. Do you think we might

venture to get her down and surprise Theresa?"

Caroline saw no reason against it. She thought Mrs. Darlington an excellent person to rouse an invalid, if rousing was required; and promised, if the invitation was sent, to add a line, entreating the widow to come as soon as possible.

Lawrence then left her to prefer his request to his mother; and as Janet really delighted in having company in the house, she readily acceded to her son's wishes, and the very next day, unknown to Theresa, the letter of invitation was dispatched.

Mrs. Darlington had settled herself very comfortably at home for the winter. Most of her particular friends were in London at this time; and there were few things she would not have chosen in preference to breaking up her plans, and going on a visit to people she felt certain she should dislike, and thought it more than probable she should quarrel with.

But Caroline's hint concerning poor,

little Tessie's low spirits—she feared to speak of her health at present—decided Isabel, at once, on sacrificing her own inclinations and running down to look after her infatuated cousin.

The widow would fix no precise time for her arrival; so one evening after dinner, when the ladies were alone together in the drawing-room, she suddenly walked in, causing everybody unbounded surprise, and sending Theresa into a fit of hysterics.

"Allow *me* to cure her," said Mrs. Darlington, making herself perfectly at home in a moment. "I understand all about these things. Thank you"—to Lady Singleton, who was endeavouring to do the honours to her unceremonious guest—"I have dined hours ago; and, with your permission, will go to my room at once, and take this poor child with me. Come, Tessie, you can finish crying as we go along, and then there will be no time wasted."

"What an extraordinary person!" said Mrs. Ashton, superciliously, when Isabel

and Theresa had disappeared. "She really looked at us as if we were gaolers, and Mrs. Lawrence our ill-used and unhappy prisoner."

"I do not think she can have been much accustomed to good society," replied Janet, with a deliciously self satisfied air: "but really it is a charity to these sort of people to let them occasionally see what pure breeding is. She will, doubtless, improve a little at Burnham Park."

Caroline laughed for the first time since she had left home; but, fortunately she was sitting behind her hostess, who was consequently deprived of the satisfaction of delivering another homily on the rules of polite manners.

In half an hour Mrs. Darlington returned with Theresa to the drawing room. The latter was apparently quite recovered, but the former had an ominous cloud upon her face, which not all Lady Singleton's attentions, nor Sir James's hospitality, nor Lawrence's quiet friendliness, nor Arthur

Cressingham's laughing gallantries, had the least power in removing.

Yet Theresa was looking infinitely better this evening than she had looked since Caroline's arrival, and her spirits were nearly as wild and joyous as in her very happiest days. Lawrence had told her that morning that she was to go home in the spring, and after that to remove to a home of her own, and leave Burnham Park for ever.

Caroline and Mrs. Darlington went up stairs together that night, and the former said, as soon as they were beyond the chance of being heard,—

"I fear you find Theresa looking worse than you expected."

"My dear Caroline," was the reply, "do not force me to speak openly at present. Tessie will make no complaints, and perhaps she is right. I have come here to watch. Heaven grant that I may not be too late."

The following day Theresa was easily

prevailed upon to take a drive with her cousin. Arthur Cressingham accompanied them on horseback, and when they returned everybody remarked how very well Mrs. Lawrence was looking, that it was only air and exercise she wanted, &c. &c.

The husband was in extacies, and seemed as if he could have knelt to Mrs. Darlington, as the successful physician; but this lady only smiled grimly, and said something about people getting into mischief and then crying out to every passer-by to help them out of it.

For a few days nothing of any moment occurred to interrupt the calm that seemed again settling over the inmates of Burnham Park. Theresa was certainly improving in health; and Lawrence, after triumphantly referring to his own established opinion, crept quietly back to his untidy den, his blotted papers, and all the brilliant hopes which had only slept while fears for his little wife had obtained a temporary asylum in his heart.

But a storm was brewing during this deceitful calm, which soon lashed up all the gently rippling waves into wild and desperate fury.

Arthur Cressingham, for reasons best known to himself, announced, one morning, at breakfast, that his visit had arrived at its termination—that he must positively bid his kind friends adieu on the following day.

Most of the party expressed sincere regret at this intelligence, for the honourable Arthur was a very general favourite: even Lawrence roused himself to beg for an extension of the visit; but it was all in vain. The gentleman had particular business elsewhere, and, of course, particular business must be attended to.

That day he rode out, as usual, with Theresa and Mrs. Darlington; but his accustomed spirits, his charming and attractive animation, seemed entirely to have deserted him. And in the evening it was just as bad. He ate scarcely any

dinner, he talked to nobody, and he sighed constantly, in a manner that bespoke very earnest grief of some kind.

Mrs. Ashton had been watching him narrowly while Caroline was singing and the rest of the party standing around the piano; but, seizing a moment when a general silence prevailed, she said, blandly—

"We ought, some of us, to be greatly flattered by Mr. Cressingham's low spirits on the eve of his departure. Any one would suppose he was about to leave the lady of his love, if it did not happen that we are all old and sober matrons."

Most of her hearers smiled at this foolish speech; but Arthur himself became crimson, and soon after went out, on pretence of smoking a cigar, and appeared no more that night.

The next day he was to start about noon; and having said good-bye to all except Mrs. Darlington and Theresa, he learned that they were in the library together, and went there to seek them.

It happened, however, that, just before he came in, the widow had gone out, and Theresa was, consequently, alone in the apartment.

"I have come to say farewell, Mrs. Singleton," began Arthur, in a strikingly mournful voice. "This is a sad necessity at all times; but I never felt it so painfully as now."

"I am sure you will be missed by everybody," said Theresa, kindly. "Why are you obliged to go?"

The young man's colour rushed to his face as promptly as it had done the night before; and when he spoke there was deep emotion in his voice.

"Because it would be dangerous for me to stay. Mrs. Singleton, do not ask me any more. We are all mortal, and my individual stock of virtue is not, I fear, sufficient for any man to boast about. Give me your hand. There, I can shake it with a pure conscience now. I may even venture to kiss it, as it will be for

the last time. God bless you, and restore you to perfect health and"—happiness, he would have said; but as he still held Theresa's hand to his lips, Lady Singleton and Mrs. Maranham had entered unheard through the door which Mr. Cressingham in his agitation had left open; and the former could no longer restrain her indignation and disgust—

"So," she said, in a voice that even Mrs. Ashton must have approved—so, this is the explanation of Mr. Cressingham's low spirits and Mrs. Lawrence's failing health. And this is the delightful consequence to my infatuated son of marrying a simple, innocent country girl, in whom, forsooth, he has such unlimited trust, that he will not open his eyes to see what everybody else can discover blindfolded. Mr. Cressingham, I can scarcely impute blame to you, knowing, as I do, that your attentions have received the most shameless encouragement from that reckless and ill-conducted young person I have the misfortune to call my daughter-in-law."

In common justice to Lady Singleton, it must be acknowledged that she firmly believed what she now stated. Mrs. Ashton did not live at Burnham Park for nothing; and, besides, there really was enough of the lover in Arthur Cressingham's voice and manner to justify, in some degree, her suspicion of a tender feeling on *his* side; and, of course, poor Theresa was to be condemned without benefit of judge or jury.

Arthur Cressingham had remained silent —thunder struck, indeed—while the incensed Janet was rapidly delivering her pleasing and charitable sentiments; but the very moment her ladyship paused for breath, or to think of something yet more bitter and insulting to hurl at Theresa, he came a step forward, and with a manner in which no trace of hesitation or reluctance could be detected, spoke thus to his antagonist—

"Lady Singleton, before I leave this house you shall estimate both me and your

daughter-in-law more justly than you do at present. You shall know *me* for a villian, and her for the best, the purest, the most innocent-hearted being that ever trod the earth. Here, in the presence of you all"—for Mrs. Darlington had returned just after the commencement of the scene—"I swear solemnly that a hundred times, since I first entered this house, have I been on the point of making love to Mrs. Lawrence Singleton, and a hundred times have her pure innocence and unmistakeable devotion to her husband rebuked my guilty thought, and made me feel myself a rascal. I do not conceal that I love her,—that she is, to me, the embodiment of all that is fair, and dear, and beautiful in woman; but, as I hope for heaven, I have never, since she has been a wife, even hinted such a thing to her until now. I go away to spare myself the struggles I have lately endured; and, after this confession, I shall, of course, come here no more. You are at liberty, Lady Singleton, to repeat what you please

to your son, and I shall be ready to give him any further explanation he may desire."

Before her astonished ladyship could frame any suitable reply, Mrs. Darlington, with tears pouring down her cheeks, had walked up firmly to the last speaker.

"Mr. Cressingham," she said, holding out her hand, "I honour you for this frank avowal. You have spoken like a man—like a *gentleman*. You have exonerated a pure woman from the foulest and most absurd suspicions. As her cousin, I thank you heartily for it; and, because of this noble atonement, I forgive you the cruel wrong you meditated. Let it be a lesson for all your future life."

Arthur Cressingham was deeply affected. He wrung the warm-hearted Isabel's offered hand, directed one yearning look towards the spot where Theresa was seated, and then, without another word or sign, abruptly quitted the room and the house for ever.

Poor Theresa made an effort to rise now and go towards her cousin, but her head swam, her eyes were dizzy, and in another moment she had fallen back on the sofa and fainted.

All three ladies, of course, rushed to her at once; but Isabel pushed away Lady Singleton, with no gentle touch, and in a stern voice forbade her to come near.

"Your very sight would be enough to destroy the unhappy child," she said, with reckless passion. "Leave her to the few friends she has in this gilded dungeon, and seek not to increase the mischief you have already done."

Janet was really frightened, and in no sort prepared to contend with the earnest and fearless widow. "I am sure," she replied, with a miserable attempt at dignity, "I had every reason to believe that Mrs. Lawrence encouraged the attentions of Mr. Cressingham, and ——"

"Encouraged the attentions of a fiddlestick!" interrupted Isabel, with increasing

passion, as Theresa gave no sign of returning animation. "Your ladyship might as well write 'fool' upon your forehead as pretend to be blind to this innocent girl's mad devotion to your thankless son. I tell you, you have killed her—you and that amiable friend of yours — between you. Perhaps you didn't mean to do it, any more than cruel boys intend to destroy the life of the poor animal who is wretched enough to fall into their power. They only mean to punish it, for being more helpless and dependent than themselves; and this is a true type of what you have been about with Theresa. I shall stay to see her recover, and then get away from this tainted atmosphere as fast as possible. I care nothing for what you may think or say of me. I have only spoken the thoughts that have been burning within me from the moment I set foot in your house, and saw *death* written in the face of my ill-fated but sinless cousin. You will take care of her now; you will strive to keep the spark

of life burning yet a little longer; and soon she will be altogether out of your power, and have the privilege of dying in peace. But, if it were not for her love for your son, I would not leave her another night under the roof that has proved so unfriendly and fatal to her."

Isabel paused here, not for lack of words, but because Theresa had now opened her eyes, and was looking timidly and wistfully round the room.

Lady Singleton, no less pale than her daughter-in-law, and far more agitated, quickly approached the sofa.

"Theresa," she said, in a quivering voice, "I regret having wronged you; but appearances certainly justified my suspicions. I am glad to see you are better, my dear. Perhaps you would like to lie down for an hour or two. Let us be friends for the future, and endeavour to forget all the disagreeables of the past."

Theresa smiled very faintly, and yielded her cold hand to her mother-in-law, who,

after pressing it slightly, turned away and walked, with as much stateliness as she could possibly assume, from the library.

That evening Mrs. Darlington left Burnham Park, without again encountering its offended mistress. Lawrence was kept in profound ignorance of all that had occurred—the widow's sudden flight being attributed to one of her constitutional caprices. Theresa was overpowered with every sort of care and attention from her mother-in-law, and in a few days the stream of events flowed on in their natural course again, and the wild and sudden storm appeared, at least, to be forgotten.

Then Caroline, who had long been yearning for home, wrote to Philip to announce her coming, and turned her weary feet thitherward.

CHAPTER XIX.

Lady Singleton, for some reason or other, chose to honour Mrs. Maranham more at her departure than she had done on the occasion of her arrival, and the carriage was consequently placed at her disposal for the whole journey, instead of for the first short stage only.

Caroline was particularly thankful for this, as the weather was now getting damp and cold, and the delicacy of her health would have rendered travelling in a public conveyance very far from desirable. Yet, in spite of every outward comfort and convenience, the half day spent in going from Burnham park to London, was a time of great anxiety and depression. Caroline was sincerely rejoiced at the prospect of returning home, of seeing her dear Philip again,

of being removed from the forced contemplation of so much that was painful to her in the place from whence she was hastening; but then she could not banish from her mind poor Theresa's altered looks and miserable forebodings, neither could she feel quite certain that Philip would really be happy at her own return.

It is true that in all his letters he had spoken of his loneliness without her; he had said how impatiently he was counting the days that she would have to stay away; he had expressed the tenderest anxiety concerning her health and spirits; but Caroline on this subject was a most determined self tormentor: she could not bring herself to believe that the vivid pleasure she would experience in the approaching re-union would be in any degree shared by the husband she so tenderly loved. Her fears weighed down her heart, and filled it with sad, instead of pleasing, images, which gathered yet more decided gloom as her journey drew to its end.

It was quite dark when the carriage began to rattle over the stones in Piccadilly, and the trembling wife knew that in a few minutes she should be clasped in her husband's arms. Caroline disliked London particularly, and yet the thought that she was going *home*, made all the familiar objects on which she now gazed seem dearer to her than the most picturesque hills and meadows and woodlands, under any other circumstances, could have done.

At length the carriage stopped before her own door, and with a pale cheek and a beating heart Caroline sprang out, and began nervously to ascend the stairs.

"Is your master come home yet?" she asked of the servant, who was carrying a candle in front, and expressing, in voluble language, her delight at seeing her mistress back again."

"Oh, ma'am," was the reply, "he hasn't been to the office at all to-day. It wasn't likely master would go out, and you coming home. I don't believe he has

moved half a dozen times from the window since I took away the breakfast things in the morning."

Before the astonished wife had time to caress this pleasing intelligence, Philip himself flung open the drawing-room door, rushed towards Caroline, and, without speaking a word, carried rather than led her into the room—placed her on a sofa, plentifully supplied with soft cushions and pillows, by the fire—hurried back to close the door again—and then knelt beside his now tearful wife, and, with his arms locked around her, murmured, in rapid and scarcely intelligible sentences, his joy at her return.

Should not Caroline's fears have been hushed to rest for ever, now ?

For the time they certainly were. She could not look on Philip's animated countenance, listen to his loving words, behold all the little preparations he had made for her comfort—the room so faultless in its neatness, the blazing fire, the

table laid for tea, and covered with every thing that he remembered she was fond of—without feeling assured of his perfect and undivided affection.

It was a happy evening for both of them. The wife had to confirm the pleasing suspicions which had first arisen in Philip's mind on the day they parted; and the husband had to express his fervent satisfaction at the prospect of becoming a father—to draw a hundred imaginary portraits of the coming son or daughter, and to lay down nearly as many schemes for growing rich and making himself a position more agreeable to his views than the one he had at present attained.

Caroline softened as much as possible the details she had to give concerning Burnham Park and its inmates; and although Philip was startled, and, for the moment, quite subdued, at the idea of Theresa being in danger, he soon rallied again; and with his constitutional hopefulness, where self was not immediately con-

cerned, felt convinced she would eventually recover, and that everything would have a joyful termination,

Oh! if these precious moments of heart-gladness, of faith in God's love, of Heaven's sunshine streaming into the soul, could only last or visit us more frequently than they do, what a paradise this world of dull care and cold realities would become!

* * * * *

The winter passed slowly, and, for the most part, wearily, to Caroline Maranham, whose health declined more and more as her time of trial approached, and whose spirits, in spite of every effort she made, sympathized too faithfully with the body's weakness.

Philip's tenderness and devotion during this time never varied. He seemed to have forgotten all former grievances—all the uncongenialities of his position—and to remember only, as a cause of a sorrow, that his poor wife was ill, and that he was not rich enough to provide her with as many

luxuries as it would have been his delight to obtain.

They were left entirely to themselves, as Caroline had never sought acquaintances; and their neighbour, Mrs. Darlington, appeared to think she could not be welcome, after the condemnation she had openly passed on Mrs. Ashton in her daughter's presence. So their intercourse, during the winter, was confined to an interchange of messages when either of them received news from Elderton, or a letter from Theresa.

The latter assured both her cousin and Caroline that she was much better in health, that she took daily exercise, that Lady Singleton was very attentive to her, and that she was anticipating, with unspeakable satisfaction, her visit to Elderton in the spring.

At length the winter, or at least the worst part of it was over, and there came for Caroline the joyful moment when she heard the tiny wail of a living child, and held in her arms and to her heart an infant daughter.

But happy, proud, delighted, as the young mother was at this event, her rejoicing appeared faint and tame compared with that of the enraptured father. He had a solemn conviction of the truth of the nurse's words—that there never had been such a child before, that it would grow up a paragon of all perfection, that its eyes were bluer, its nose straighter, its forehead whiter than that of any other baby that had ever been launched upon the troubled waters of life.

In less than two hours after its birth, Philip had settled that it should be christened at Elderton, that Mrs. Forrest and Theresa should be its godmothers, that it should be named Caroline, and finally, that it should be educated at Fairfield house.

The wife smiled, as soon as she was able, at all this enthusiasm, but against the last two arrangements she entered her earnest protest. Theresa, and not Caroline, she said, was to be their child's name, and if it lived, she would educate it entirely herself.

For the next month every thing went on pretty well, and Philip endured, with exemplary fortitude, all the evils attendant upon the advent of a first child in a family of limited means and still more limited experience. But when Caroline's health was re-established, and the nurse had taken her departure, and the poor baby began to give indication of remarkable talent in the art of screaming, affairs assumed a somewhat different aspect; and sour, discontented looks or impatient exclamations were substituted for that halo of cheerful contentment which had recently shone into Caroline's quiet home.

It is true it could no longer in strict veracity be called a *quiet* home; but then—as the fond mother would often tell her husband when he uttered his complaints—little children must cry sometimes, and love ought to pay no heed to these few thorns amongst life's roses.

What annoyed and displeased Philip more than all, was the time and attention

that Caroline was obliged (though to her the obligation was certainly a delightful one) to bestow upon the helpless baby. He was quite sure she cared for nothing and nobody in the wide world except that squalling brat; he really wondered what charms she could find in it; and when the affectionate wife, willing to soothe her jealous husband, hinted at its being her duty to devote herself to the child, he would reply in his old, sarcastic way :—

"Oh, to be sure, I had forgotten it was a young lady from Fairfield House that I have to deal with."

Thus, with a plentiful sprinkling of domestic storms, and a few gleams of re-animating sunshine, passed the time between the birth of Caroline's infant, and that previously fixed upon for their visit to Mrs. Forrest, at Elderton.

CHAPTER XX.

Lawrence himself brought his wife to town and committed her to Mrs. Maranham's care, with a thousand anxious and affectionate charges. He assured Caroline he had not a shadow of uneasiness respecting his little Tessie now. She certainly had not yet recovered all her bloom, and for the last few weeks she had had a tiresome cough; but her native air would, of course, set all to rights; and when their new house was found, she would take possession of it in stronger health than ever, and outshine the roses in her own garden.

Theresa had a doubtful, yearning look upon her face while her husband thus spoke of the future, and when the moment for parting with him came, Caroline feared that the silent agony she was suffering would prove of serious injury to her feeble

and wasted strength. Lawrence was powerfully affected too, and he said that, if he had not to attend to a second edition of his book, which was just going through the press, he would have accompanied them to Elderton himself, and not have left his wife until her health and nerves were stronger.

As it was, he should have to remain for about a month in London, then look for a house a little way in the country; and when that was found and put in perfect order, he would come and fetch Theresa, and introduce her to her new home.

As long as her husband remained with them, Theresa managed to preserve an outward calmness that made him believe she looked forward to the future as hopefully and confidently as himself; but scarcely had he left the house, after pressing her for the last time in his arms, ere all her prisoned grief became unbound, and poor Caroline's offices of tender friendship began in earnest.

"I thought," said the latter, as she bent over her wildly sobbing guest, "that you had long wished ardently to go to your former home. Dear Theresa, it would be better, even now, to remain with your husband than to let your mother see you in this state of wretchedness."

"Oh! Caroline," was the choking answer,—"I do, indeed, wish still to go to Elderton to see my dear, dear father and mother once more; but I did not think what it would be to part with Lawrence, uncertain, as I am, whether my life will be spared till we can meet again."

"But I hoped, from your letters, Theresa, that you had got over these gloomy apprehensions. You do not feel worse than during the winter, do you?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I do; but my conviction that I am dying rarely changes. And, oh! Caroline, does it not seem a hard, hard fate, just when the clouds of my earthly destiny are dispersing and all the future is illumined by a sunshine I shall never see?"

Caroline could not pursue this conversation at present. Her hopes predominated too slightly over her fears to permit of her offering any real consolation to her afflicted little friend.

She prevailed on Theresa to go down to the pleasant drawing-room, to sit by the open window, where the soft, mild breeze might blow on her flushed cheek; to notice the pretty baby whose crying fit was, fortunately, over for the day; and to talk of all the old scenes they should revisit together, when once they got to Elderton.

When Philip came home Theresa was wonderfully composed; and although he was inexpressibly shocked at the change he saw in her, he did not suffer any feeling of the kind to appear in his warm and friendly greeting. Mrs. Darlington came to tea, in honour of her cousin's arrival; and the evening was got over much better than Caroline had dared to expect.

The next morning, at an early hour, the Maranhams, with their precious charge—

accompanied, too, by a nurse and baby—bade adieu to the smoke and dust of London, and began their journey to the long forsaken village of Elderton.

* * * * *

It is a general and undoubtedly a correct idea, that amongst all earth's sorrows, there are few to be compared to the partings of friends and relatives whose hearts are closely bound together; but I can imagine circumstances which would make the reunion of these same loving friends and relatives infinitely more agonizing than their former partings had been.

And such was the case with the meeting between Theresa and her parents.

"If," as the poor mother, in the midst of her bitter and passionate weeping, said —"they had been in any degree prepared to find their darling thus, to see decay written in every feature of that beloved and gentle face, the blow would have fallen with a less stunning power. But nobody had prepared them for it—Mrs. Darlington

alone (after her visit to Burnham park) having spoken vaguely of her cousin's being thinner and paler than she used to be.

For the first few days after her arrival at home, Theresa was too weak to leave her room; but when the physician, whom her father had fetched from Oxendean, saw her, he recommended as much air as possible, and gave them hopes that the decline was but a temporary one.

From this time she began to get out a little every day, and as, in consequence, a faint bloom soon appeared upon her cheek, the spirits of her loving and watchful friends revived in a most rapid manner, and cheerful voices were once more heard in the old rectory, and extended to Mrs. Forrest's cottage, where the gentle widow, with her beloved inmates, had nothing but Theresa's uncertain fate to cloud the happiness of their reunion.

Hitherto the invalid had not ventured beyond the rectory grounds and the green lane immediately adjoining them. She

would walk about in the sunshine with her mother during the day, but in the evening she liked best to wander quite alone in the mazy garden, to search out the flowers and trees she had planted ; to mark their growth and progress, and perchance to recall the vanished hours of her joyous and petted girlhood.

But one morning (it was the day before Caroline's child was to be christened) Theresa expressed to Mrs. Maranham, an anxious wish to go with her that evening to the bennel. The mother was consulted on the prudence of such an undertaking, but she shook her head, and advised yet a few days delay.

"Dearest mamma," pleaded Theresa, "it cannot possibly hurt me, and it will be a sort of preparation for to-morrow. I have fully made up my mind to be present at the christening of my god-daughter."

"My own dearest," said the anxious mother, "I should fear the cold church"—

"Fear nothing," replied the daughter,

coaxingly, "for I must have my way, both for to-night and to-morrow too."

It was finally decided that a carriage should be procured, to convey the two ladies to the bennel, and to wait there while Theresa walked for half an hour or so, in the quiet spot of which she had been so fond.

It was fortunately an unusually warm evening, and when Caroline called for her friend, she found her ready dressed, and nervously anxious to set out.

A drive of about ten minutes, during which Theresa had scarcely spoken, brought them to the entrance of the bennel; and leaving the carriage, Mrs. Maranham and her companion began to walk slowly through the blooming gorse and heather, which to both of them spoke so familiarly —to one of them so oppressively, of other days.

"It is all unchanged," said Theresa, first breaking the silence, and struggling to give calm utterance to her thoughts;

"and so it will be, I suppose, when years have rolled away, and summer's suns and winter's rains have fallen upon my forgotten grave. For I *shall* be forgotten in time, you know, Carry, like all the other perishing things of earth; and even Lawrence, my own Lawrence, who has so loved me, will find new objects of interest, and only give a passing sigh to the memory of the little wife who neglected even her soul's welfare in adoring him!"

Caroline could not speak for her fast gushing tears, and presently, Theresa (not appearing to notice this heartfelt sympathy,) continued,—

"We are taught that our Father in Heaven chastens those He loves, and I think now that He loves me, Caroline, unworthy, rebellious, sinful as I have been. I am trying, oh, so hard! to reconcile myself to leaving this bright and beautiful world; but the flesh, the poor human flesh, is weak, and will cleave to its earthly idols. I have come here to-night, Caro-

line, to take my last farewell of the poor old bennel. I call it 'poor,' but it is myself I am thinking of. There is no grave preparing for this verdant spot of earth, which will smile again as mockingly and serenely as it does now, when I have looked my last upon it, and watered its blooming flowers with tears wrung from my heart—and such an aching heart, Carry!"

The tears she spoke of interrupted her mournful words; and Caroline, after keeping silence for a few agitating minutes, said with much emotion,—

"Theresa, if you really feel ill enough to justify in any degree these sad forebodings, you must not dream of being present at to-morrow's ceremony; and you have done very wrong, very unwisely, in coming out to-night."

"Dear Caroline," was the quick reply, "I *must* go with you all, to-morrow; and as for to-night, I had set my heart upon bidding good bye to this haunt of my merry

days. Once before, you may remember, on my marriage eve, I took a loving farewell of it, now it is a final one. The eyes that beheld it, shall behold it no more. Go on, Carry—leave me for a little while alone.

When Theresa joined her friend again, her face was deadly pale, but all signs of tears had vanished, and by the time they arrived at the rectory, the faint bloom had returned to her fair cheek, and Mrs. Berrington had no reason to suspect the imprudence of the indulgence she had granted.

The next morning rose bright and warm —a real, exquisite, balmy May day ; with flowers, sunshine, blue skies, and winds from the gentle west. Theresa was in better spirits than she had been since her arrival at home. She admired and caressed the fat baby, in its long snowy robes, and elaborately adorned cap and hood; hung round its neck a splendid coral and bells—her own christening gift to her little name-

sake—and paid the smiling father and mother a hundred pretty compliments on the dawning beauties of their precious babe.

During the short drive to the church, everybody remarked how well the invalid appeared. Her usual langour had given place to a cheerful animation, her eyes were bright and sparkling, and she had scarcely coughed at all since first rising in the morning.

As they walked slowly through the pretty churchyard, Mrs. Maranham observed, however, that Theresa's eyes wandered, with a strange expression, amongst the humble tombstones that met their gaze on every side.

"It matters little," she said, turning to Caroline, who walked beside her, "where the poor worn out body rests, when the immortal soul has cast it off; but there, where those dark trees meet, and few gleams of sunshine come, I should like, I think, to be laid. Will you remember this, Carry?"

The short ceremony of baptizing an infant soul into the church of Christ was soon over; and, fearful of fatigue for Theresa, the whole party drove as speedily as possible to the rectory, where they were all to dine and spend the rest of the day.

"A letter from your husband, my dear," said Mrs. Berrington, taking up rather a bulky packet that was laying on the drawing-room table when they entered. "This is an unexpected treat, is it not?"

Theresa turned very pale, but hastened to her own room with the treasure, telling her friends she would join them again in a few minutes.

Mrs. Berrington having to provide refreshments for her guests, and her guests having to dilate on the wonderfully good behaviour of baby, the time passed by almost unheeded; and nearly an hour had expired from the moment of Theresa's leaving them before anybody had leisure to remark that her absence was strangely prolonged.

Then the mother, whose anxiety rarely slumbered, said she would go and see what had become of the truant; and Caroline, with a sudden and unaccountable foreboding of evil, sprang up to follow her.

Mrs. Berrington knocked at her daughter's door, on reaching it; but not receiving an immediate answer, she turned to Caroline, whose footsteps she had heard behind, and said, with ill-concealed alarm—

"What can be the matter? Tessie, surely, will not have lain down and fallen asleep."

"Let us go in, at all hazards," replied Mrs. Maranham, promptly.

And the mother opened the door.

Alas! how little does the fond parent dream—when first she holds to her beating heart the child she has purchased with so many pangs—of the possible sorrows that may pierce her, in the coming days, through this yet unconscious object of her love and joy.

How little had poor Mrs. Berrington

ever dreamt that she should live to see her bright, her beautiful, her blooming Tessie, stretched corpse-like on the cold ground, with the life blood flowing slowly from her parted and colourless lips.

Yet there and thus she lay; her husband's letter clenched tightly in one of the thin, white hands, and nothing else to explain the apparently dying state in which they found her.

The mother neither screamed nor fainted till, with Caroline's assistance, she had raised her stricken child upon the bed; and then, with an "oh!" that spoke more of human anguish than the most violent and passionate lamentations could have done, she sank quietly to the ground, without sense or motion.

* * * * * *

Theresa had broken a blood vessel in the lungs, and the physician gave slight hopes now of her recovery. When everything that could be done for her, *had* been done, and her nearest friends, including the poor

mother (who would not be kept away), stood weeping round the bed, somebody proposed examining the husband's letter, to see if it contained any intelligence that would account for the terrible effect it appeared to have produced.

But after it had been read, they—none of them, except Caroline—felt much more enlightened than they had done before. It simply stated that he had seen a beautiful place in the country, which he was almost decided to fix upon; that there was a lovely garden for his sweet Tessie, and scenery all around, which he felt certain she would delight in. Then followed an eloquent, touching picture of their future life—of the care he would bestow upon his darling—of the atonement he would make for all former neglects—and of the long, long happy days, and months, and years, they should spend in their tranquil home together.

Caroline understood it all; and as she looked through blinding tears at the pale

broken lily stretched in such ominous stillness upon the bed, her thoughts wandered to the yet unconscious husband, whose fond dreams were so soon to be dispelled by the cold-eyed messenger from the land of shadows and darkness.

* * * * *

"Not yet, not yet? But the hours are slow and weary. Death will travel faster, I fear, than my poor Lawrence; and he will grieve sorely if he comes too late to see his poor Tessie alive. Dear mother, give me your hand, and stay beside me here. My eyes are heavy, and perhaps I may sleep again."

Theresa spoke thus the third morning after her illness, when, awaking from a disturbed slumber, produced by laudanum, she had been disappointed at not finding her husband yet arrived.

In a few minutes she fell asleep again, and only awoke when the evening sun was streaming through her bed-room window; and Caroline Maranham had, for a brief

period, taken the mother's place at the bedside.

A bouquet of fresh beautiful violets, and other sweet and fragrant spring flowers, lay on the pillow by the invalid.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, grasping them eagerly, while a bright and rapid flush rose to her cheek and brow—"Now I know that my Lawrence has arrived, and has brought me these lovely, lovely flowers, which will fade no sooner than I shall. Caroline, kind friend, faithful to the last, do not deceive me. It is true, is it not, that my husband has come?"

"No, dearest Theresa," replied Caroline sadly; "you must have a little patience yet. It was *my* husband who brought you these pretty flowers."

The dying wife clasped her thin hands, looked up meekly to Heaven, and then turned on her pillow, and spoke no more that evening.

* * * * *

Lawrence had come at last. He was

alone with his wife; he had brought his mind, with almost supernatural efforts, to the conviction that she was really dying; that Death was going to rob him for ever of his soul's darling, his little Tessie; his fond and gentle bird, the dear "wife of his youth."

From the moment of coming into her presence, he had been like a man under some sudden and direful sentence—heart paralyzed, and incapable of any feeling save that of a wild and nameless dread.

She had been talking to him long and earnestly; trying in the midst of all her own unspoken sorrow, to reconcile this worshipped husband to the bitter, but inevitable parting. Few and brief had been the words that answered her from the breaking heart of her stricken listener; and these words had done little towards softening the anguish that rolled in waves of ever-increasing strength, over her poor struggling soul.

Struggling to wean itself from the iron-

bound affections of earth, and to mount in faith to the land beyond the tomb.

* * * * *

Another interval of rest from suffering—another few hours snatched from the pitiless spirit whose office it is to wrestle with the faith and hope of dying Christians, and to fright them with gloomy visions from his own dark kingdom.

Theresa had slept once more, and during this last slumber the angel of peace and submission had descended upon her departing soul.

The sands of life were waning fast—earth's glories were becoming dim—and time was gliding gently into eternity, while still the mourners who would be left, had experienced no alleviation of their settled woe.

The dying girl had taken a solemn farewell of every one, had blessed them with all the strength and energy that yet remained to her; and now her only earthly thought was Lawrence — Lawrence, in whose loved arms she rested, whose dry,

fixed eyes never strayed a moment from the rapidly changing features of the sweet, withering flower he could still call his own.

Suddenly Theresa turned over the pages of a bible that she had long held in her hand, and directing a fond and anxious look towards her wretched husband, whispering softly—"Dearest, this is for you, *my parting legacy*"—she read aloud, in a voice of surprising clearness, these words from Ecclesiastes:—

"And further, my son, by these be admonished. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

It was nature's last expiring effort. With the concluding word the book fell from the reader's hand—the head drooped a little lower on her husband's shoulder—the blue eyes closed in the long sleep of death—and one of love's brightest, purest dreams was for ever ended.

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE were many mourners for Theresa—many who felt that in her grave their dearest earthly interest was buried; but the stricken husband claims our first and deepest sympathies. Over his fate our warmest and freshest tears must be shed.

Lawrence did not bewail his young wife's loss with loud and passionate lamentations, as some husbands would have done, but he suffered his nameless woe to eat into his heart—to consume, slowly but surely, the springs of life—to spread over all his existence the black shadows of the grave, long before the grave opened her cold arms to receive him.

Whether any self-reproach, for not having yielded more exclusive devotion to the frail creature who so fearlessly trusted her earthly happiness to him, mingled with

Lawrence Singleton's wild regret for Theresa, none could ever tell. For he had no confidants: he seemed far beyond the ordinary consolations of sympathy and friendship, and was content to lock up every maddening sorrow in his desolate heart.

But he studied no more—he wrote no more. Had the laurel crown—once the glittering object of his passionate craving—been laid now at his very feet he would not have put out his hand to raise and bind it on his weary brows. Henceforth the world might grow wise, or stumble on in its old and foolish errors—he had nothing more to do with it. His little hour of usefulness had passed for ever; his occupation was, truly, gone.

Sir James and Lady Singleton were confounded at this settled grief. They could not understand, however, that it was to have no limit, no end, but in the grave; and once, only once—for the result of their experiment did not encourage them to repeat it—they hinted to their son that it was his duty, as well as his interest, to

marry again—the title and estate passing, in default of male heirs, to quite a distinct branch of the family.

Lawrence appeared, at first, unable to comprehend the utter strangeness and enormity of such a proposition; but as it became clear to him that he had heard aright, an almost livid hue overspread his cheek and lips—and, without uttering a single word, he left the room and the house, and several weeks elapsed ere he again appeared in his accustomed place.

It may be urged that this was the conduct of a madman; and I am far from asserting that Lawrence was not mad—at least on this one particular point. But, be that as it may, neither his father nor mother ever again alluded to a second connection for him; and the vain, weak Janet was amply punished (in the reflection that their name would soon return to its original obscurity) for the share she had had in hastening her unoffending daughter-in-law's death.

At length there came for Lawrence an

hour when, in the words of one of the purest modern poets, he could have said,—

"Je me sens un besoin de repos inconnu,
Un voile sur mes yeux, des ombres dans ma chambre,
Des ailes dans le cœur, du plomb dans chaque membre."

And when, with these wings in his heart, he waited impatiently for the angel's signal to unfurl them, and mount up to find his loved and lost one in the land beyond the ether.

His last and only request was to be buried beside Theresa, in the little churchyard at Elderton. And there, where the dark trees meet and few gleams of sunshine come, the husband and wife repose till the great day of universal awakening.

"Daily the tides of life go ebbing and flowing beside them,—
Thousands of throbbing hearts, where theirs are at rest for ever,—
Thousands of aching brains, where theirs no longer are busy,—
Thousands of toiling hands, where theirs have ceased from their labours,—
Thousands of weary feet, where theirs have completed their journey."

Of the other actors in my story some little yet remains to be told.

Philip was obliged to return to his duties in London a few days after Theresa's death; but Caroline lingered yet a short time to bear her part in consoling the bereaved parents, who seemed as though they would have sunk under the sudden and fearful blow.

Poor Mrs. Forrest, too, was not the least sincere amongst Theresa's mourners; and the thought of being left again alone in the cottage which bore her little favourite's name, and which was associated with so many touching memories of the rector's fair daughter, was painful beyond description to the widow's warm and loving heart.

Before Caroline went away, it was settled that Mrs. Forrest, at the expiration of her short lease, should give up her present dwelling, and remove to within a short distance of her beloved relatives, in whose society she could the most easily forget the sorrows of her early days.

It was in the bright month of June that Caroline Maranham, after her second absence, prepared to return to the home she so dearly loved—loved in spite of the occasional clouds that brooded over it and the thorns that, from time to time, were found hidden amongst the roses.

Yet even now she was not altogether free from anxious fears. Philip had often, during the time he was at Elderton, given tokens of some settled discontent—some pining after what was not and, probably, could never be. The kinder her husband was to her the more bitterly Caroline lamented her incapability of rendering him perfectly happy — her powerlessness to remove the cankerworm that appeared to be preying upon his heart.

She reached home, as on a former occasion, in the evening; and having seen nurse and baby comfortably established in their own apartment, Caroline sat down by the window in the drawing-room, to watch for Philip's return. The servant

said he had left word, in the morning, that he should be home earlier than usual; but it was later now than he had ever been known to stay,

Poor Caroline! She was ready in a moment with a thousand apprehensions. Philip knew that she was coming; he must have felt certain she would not change her plans—she had so entreated of him to be at home, if possible, to receive her. He was too kind, under any circumstances, voluntarily to absent himself. What could have happened to him?

Calm as Caroline was by nature, she would assuredly, on this occasion, have very soon worked herself into a nervous fever, had not the sudden, well-known knock at the door, and the well-known rapid step upon the stairs, changed her torturing anxiety into deep joy and thankfulness.

Philip did not enter the room with his usual careless impetuosity; neither did he, as Caroline expected, immediately begin

an explanation of his prolonged absence; but he walked straight up to his wife, and, folding her in his arms with quite a solemn tenderness, held her to his heart in a way that he had never done before.

"My dear one," he said at length, with strange emotion—"my darling—my own sweet Carry! Now, indeed, I shall be happy! Henceforth you will hear no impatient murmurings, no bitter or angry words. For the young lady from Fairfield House has disappeared for ever, and in her place I find my own—own wife, *who loves me!*"

"Philip—dear Philip," ——

"Nay, but I will tell you all, and then you shall repeat 'Philip—dear Philip' a thousand times. I shall never weary of hearing it, now that I know I am really dear to you—dear as you are, and have been to me, since the hour this little ring bound our destinies for life."

The story was not a long one. Philip, in Caroline's absence, had occasion to go to

her desk for a paper of his own, which she had offered to keep safely for him. This desk contained two secret drawers, in one of which the required document was deposited. Philip, however, managed to open the wrong one, and found, instead of his own paper, various letters belonging to his wife, and amongst them a small sealed packet addressed to himself. Without a moment's thought he opened it, and—with what surprise may be imagined—read the following words:—

"I have just received an offer of marriage from Philip Maranham, and here, in the same spot where I have opened and read his letter, I at once determine on accepting it. I have loved him long and deeply. I shall be happy in devoting my life to him. And in case of my dying first, I shall leave to him this confession, which, for reasons he will understand, I never intend him to become possessed of till the grave has closed over me.

"CAROLINE MARANHAM."

"And now," said Philip, when all was told, and Caroline was weeping tears of joy in his arms,—"we will thank God for his great goodness and mercy. Not only has He opened to each of us the heart of the other, and thus removed the thorns that must have wounded us all our lives through, but He has also blessed us in our temporal condition, and given us something over and above our daily bread. Yes, dearest Caroline, my absence to-night was caused by my unexpected nomination to an appointment that will place you somewhat nearer to the position you ought to fill, and at the same time enable me to put by a few odd grains for the future wants of our darling little Tessie."

The rest is soon told, for there are few other characters in whom the reader will now feel any interest.

Dr. and Mrs. Berrington did not live many years after their beloved child, whose premature death struck a chill to their hearts, that they could never quite get over. The pretty rectory passed into other

hands, the cottage was bought by a small landed proprietor in the neighbourhood, and every trace of those who had lived, and loved, and suffered there, soon died altogether away.

Mrs. Darlington continued unmarried, and to reside, as she had always done, in London; but her cousin's fate had quenched much of her charming gaiety, and she even ceased to ridicule her numerous admirers so unmercifully, as she had formerly delighted in doing.

Mrs. Ashton remained at Burnham park, till its increasing gloom had an injurious effect upon her constitution, and then she married her lawyer, and found out that there were worse things in life than the absence of gaiety and the want of fashionable society.

And to those who have felt any sympathy with the joys and sorrows of the honourable Arthur Cressingham, it may not be uninteresting to learn that he eventually took compassion upon the young

lady who had given him her heart unasked, on the occasion of their first meeting together under the roof of Sir James Singleton. The marriage was not an unhappy one; but Arthur Cressingham, like many others, often saw, by his own hearth as well as in the busy world, a shadowy vision with blue eyes and waving hair, and turned from his gay young wife to think of one who slept beneath the dark yew trees in the humble churchyard at Elderton.

Such was Mrs. Forrest's story, though I have necessarily, in repeating it, used my own words and my own sentiments instead of hers. The reader will anticipate all that I have now to add,—will guess that the thoughtless girl, who sat beside her venerable and gentle friend on that fair summer's day, was the second Theresa—"the fat baby," in the story to which she had been listening.

Mrs. Forrest had received permission from my beloved and ever indulgent pa-

rents, to tell me as much of their former history, and that of my unfortunate and beautiful godmother, as she thought fit. To me the narration had been full of interest, even before I guessed that those to whom I owed my being were amongst the principal actors in the drama; and when this truth was apparent to me, I was never weary of asking questions concerning the different events in which these beloved ones had played a part.

To gratify an earnest wish of mine, my father took me, the summer after I had been staying with Mrs. Forrest, to visit the little village of Elderton.

We obtained permission to walk round the rectory garden, where every flower and shrub, and particularly those quaint old labyrinthine alleys, spoke to me, in touching language, of that sweet Theresa, to whose melancholy fate I could never succeed in reconciling myself.

We next went to the churchyard, and stood awhile, in mute sadness, beside the

grass-grown mounds of earth which covered the mortal remains of as fond a pair as the blue skies ever smiled upon. My father was powerfully affected, and guessing what his feelings must be, I soon proposed leaving this mournful spot, and directing our steps towards the next object of interest—the "dear old bennel," on the green hill side.

The sun was nearly setting when we reached it, but a few bright gleams still lingered, and cast their mellow light over the blooming gorse and heather, which was, indeed, with all around it, unchanged since the far-off day when poor Theresa's parting tears had fallen amongst the fragrant blossoms, and her farewell words had risen like a wail on the summer air. If I had stayed there long, I believe my excited imagination would have conjured up the-white robed form of her whose quiet grave I had so recently been gazing on.

"Dear papa," I said, "let us return now; there is something in this place too

saddening, even for such a thoughtless, light-hearted creature as you all call me."

Slowly and silently we retraced our steps, both too completely carried back to the past to be able to converse on any ordinary topics. I fancied we were going at once to the village, where we had secured beds for the night; but just before we came in sight of it, my companion turned down a green, narrow, hawthorn lane, hurrying me on quickly till we arrived in front of what appeared to have been, in days long past, a picturesque and tasteful specimen of a gothic cottage.

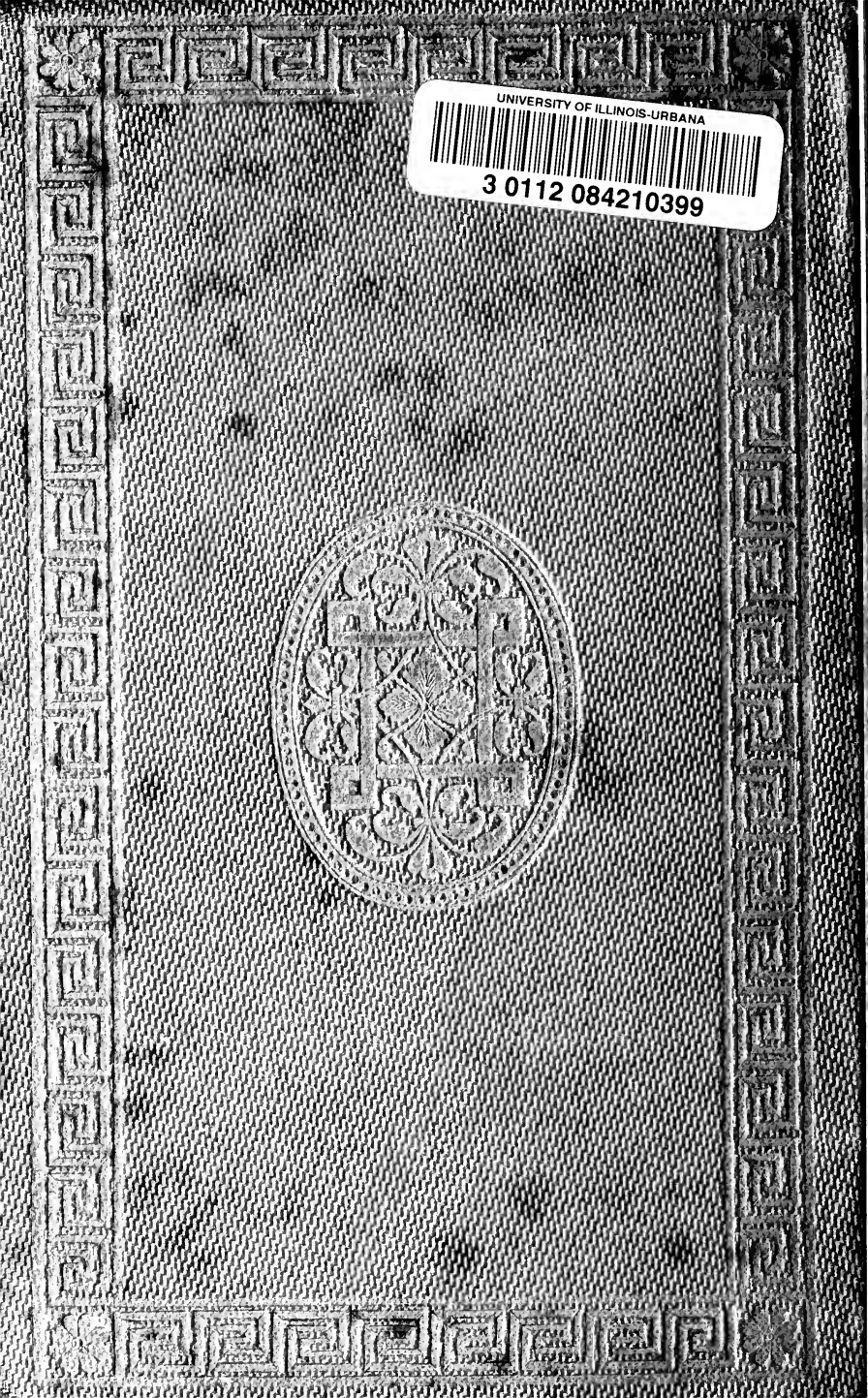
Here we paused and looked around us with keen and vivid interest. Yet there was nothing—to me at least—in any way familiar in the aspect of this wild and neglected place. The moss-grown roof—the windows, hidden by the straggling and untended creepers—the wilderness garden and the broken fences—spoke, indeed, of ruin and decay, but of none of those fair scenes amongst which my thoughts were at present wandering.

To my father, however, it appeared to be different. He left my side abruptly, and I watched him, as he threaded his way with difficulty through the tangled shrubs and rose-bushes of the once fair garden; and I saw that memory was thrusting her magic glass before him, and perhaps transforming the wild scene he looked upon into what it had been in the old days gone by.

For awhile I left him to himself—I was content to be forgotten; but suddenly, in a voice of strong emotion, and with a more mournful look than I had ever seen upon his face, he called me to his side; and, removing with his stick some of the luxuriant and untrained clematis from the discoloured walls, we read together the explanatory and familiar words—

"THERESA COTTAGE."

T. C. Newby, Printer, 30, Welbeck-street, Cavendish-square.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